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Shot first

A TOP Hamas fugitive, found dead at the scene of a car bomb explosion on Sunday in Ramallah, was shot before the blast was triggered by remote control, Palestinian pathologists and security officials said yesterday. Palestinian officials did not say who killed Mohiyedine Sharif but Hamas leaders blamed Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu denied the allegations.

Hamas retaliated with four suicide bombings after its chief bomb-maker, Yehiya Ayyash, was assassinated in January 1996 in an operation widely attributed to Israel.

Sharif, 32, was seen as Ayyash's heir, and Israel held him responsible for two suicide bombings in Jerusalem in July and September 1997. He topped Israel's most wanted list and has been in hiding for the past few years.

Death threats

THE WRITER and director of a controversial Israeli documentary about armed Palestinian acts against Israel in the 1970s has received more than 20 anonymous telephone death threats and hate calls over the past three weeks from Jewish radicals, the *Jerusalem Post* reported yesterday. Ronit Weiss-Berkowitz's film, *Path of Terror — Biladi Biladi*, is to be aired on Sunday on Israel's Channel One public TV station as part of a 22-part documentary series marking the 50th anniversary of the creation of Israel in 1948.

Weiss-Berkowitz said the death threats began after her name was published in a newspaper article following the resignation of the presenter of the series, Yehoram Gaon, who stepped down midway through the screenings rather than host an episode that presents the Palestinian vision of Israel as the enemy.

Other episodes in the series have also been the focus of angry protests from right-wing, Israeli groups which have objected to the amount of attention being focused on the plight of Palestinian Arabs following the loss of their land.

Palace maps

THE FIRST visits to six Iraqi presidential palaces by UN arms experts have achieved their objective of technically mapping the compounds, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, head of the diplomatic corps monitoring the inspections, said yesterday. He added that the inspectors would visit two more palaces in Baghdad before winding up their mission in the next few days.

However, UN sanctions will not be lifted until the inspectors certify that Iraq is bereft of all weapons of mass destruction and is unable to make any more, AP reported.

Dhanapala said inspectors made second visits on Tuesday to three palaces to clarify some problems and that there was full cooperation from the Iraqi authorities.

Printing ban

THE General Authority for Free Zones and Investments has banned printers located in duty-free zones from printing newspapers and magazines of any kind and in any language.

The publishing ban announced on Tuesday will affect more than 30 offshore publications in both Arabic and English — most of them licensed outside the country — that have taken advantage of lower free zone printing costs.

The decree prevents these publications being printed, but does not prohibit their distribution in Egypt, nor that of other foreign publications.

'Hard times ahead'

Following the failure of Dennis Ross's latest mission, Arab diplomacy moves into high gear to arrange an Arab mini-summit

As President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat met in the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh for talks yesterday, diplomatic sources said efforts were underway to arrange an Arab mini-summit before the end of this month.

The Mubarak-Arafat talks, as well as the mini-summit, have the same objective: taking stock of the year-long deadlock in peace-making and charting the future course of Arab diplomacy.

"The idea of a summit is hanging in the air and is likely to land at any time," a diplomatic source said, following the failure of American envoy Dennis Ross, on his latest visit to the region, to persuade Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to soften his position.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, after she was briefed by Ross upon his return to Washington, said there has been no breakthrough in the peace process but the United States would "keep making sure that the process moves forward."

"Ambassador Ross went out there with some ideas in order to try and narrow the gap and there has been some progress as a result of his most recent trip. But it's not nearly enough, I think, for us to say that there has been a breakthrough," Albright said.

"It is important that there has been some movement, but we also have to make very clear that there is a level of frustration both here and in the Middle East because the stalemate has gone on," she said.

Albright's comments to reporters at the White House came one day after her spokesman raised the option of ending US peace-making efforts in the Middle East if the diplomatic stalemate persists.

Asked to assess Washington's next steps after Ross returned from the region, State Department spokesman James Rubin said Monday: "There are many options, and one option has always been to disengage."

Albright sounded a more positive note on Tuesday, saying the US would continue to push the Israelis and Palestinians to break their deadlock on the West Bank and anti-terrorism security measures.

"Obviously, we are concerned about the fact that for a year now there has been a stalemate," she said. "We want to keep making sure that the process moves forward and that the gaps are narrowed."

According to diplomatic sources in Cairo, the American ideas Ross brought to the region fell far short of Palestinian expectations. And yet, Netanyahu found them unacceptable under the pretext the Americans demanded from the Israelis much more than they could offer.

In the words of one diplomat, "the moment of truth" has arrived and also the moment for Arab action. Efforts are underway to convene an Arab mini-summit, likely to group Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, before the end of this month.

To make preparations for the summit, high-level meetings are expected in the coming two weeks, similar to a meeting in Riyadh last Monday that was attended by the foreign ministers of Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia as well as Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

"Meetings and consultations will be intensified," and they will not be confined to these three countries and the Palestinians, but will also include other Arab states, a source said. These meetings will decide the venue and size of the summit as well as the "language and tone" that will emerge from it, the source added.

In another possible scenario, the summit will be expanded to include — in addition to Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia — Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Morocco.

"The Syrians have been pushing for this summit for some time because they believe that there is a need to re-assess the situation in the peace process and Saudi Arabia was not opposed to the idea," a source said.

Now, Egypt is convinced that closer inter-Arab coordination is necessary to prepare for the "hard times" ahead as a result of the continuing stalemate, the source added.

Asked about the Egyptian position on the latest American ideas, a source said: "We have been advising the Palestinians to listen to what the Americans are offering. But we simply cannot encourage or persuade them to accept something that they do not see as good enough; it is something that we also don't see as good enough."

According to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, the American ideas, if they are to be workable, should be "balanced and consistent with the signed agreements."

Obviously, they were not. Palestinian cabinet minister Nabil Shaath said, following a meeting with Moussa in Cairo on Monday, "On every point [that was suggested by the Americans] we had questions that needed answers and explanations."

The Palestinians' "problems" with the American ideas are not only about the scope and quality of the overdue second Israeli redeployment from the West Bank. More alarming for them is that they do not have American guarantees that there will be a third redeployment, that should be carried out next June, before the two sides embark on the final status negotiations.

The US also wants the Palestinian Authority to commit itself to some tough anti-resistance measures that could erode Arafat's popularity.

As for Israeli settlement activities in the occupied lands, the American initiative fell short of the minimum acceptable to the Palestinians. There was not even a clear reference to a proposed gradual slowdown of settlement building that should come to a halt once the final status negotiations open, a source said.

(see p.5)

Dina Ezzat *in Cairo,*
Nevine Khalil *in Sharm El-Sheikh,*
Wire dispatches



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Conditional withdrawal?

ISRAEL'S inner security cabinet yesterday adopted UN Security Council Resolution 425 calling for Israel to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon, Israeli officials said.

"They adopted it within the framework of the need for adequate security guarantees," Reuters quoted Israeli government spokesman Moshe Fogel as saying.

Israel has made any withdrawal from the 15km deep southern Lebanon occupation zone conditional on Lebanese security guarantees to prevent guerrilla attacks on its northern border. A political source said the inner cabinet vote was unanimous.

According to the Associated Press, the vote marked a fundamental change in Israeli policy, with the government for the first time agreeing to withdraw troops without first reaching a formal peace agreement with Lebanon.

But AP also said that it was not immediately clear whether the cabinet decision, beyond its symbolic value, would bring Israel any closer to a withdrawal.

UN Resolution 425 calls for a unilateral Israeli pullback, but Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said he would only order a withdrawal after having reached security understandings, albeit informal ones, with Lebanon.

Israel wants the Lebanese army to deploy in southern Lebanon to prevent attacks on northern Israel by the Shi'ite Hizbullah group.

Lebanese President Elias Hrawi, addressing a news conference in Abu Dhabi, said yesterday Lebanon would not open negotiations with Israel on security arrangements.

"There will be no negotiations at all with Israel if it wants to withdraw from southern Lebanon," Hrawi said. "Israel must implement UN Resolution 425 and the United Nations should enforce this resolution. There should be no conditions."

Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bouez said in Beirut: "This offer is not new. This is a ploy. They want to change the terms of Resolution 425 and force Lebanon to start security negotiations."

Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon, also opposes the Israeli proposal, saying any pullback must be linked to an agreement on the Golan Heights.

The Israeli cabinet's decision came at a time when the peace talks with the Palestinians were hopelessly deadlocked and Netanyahu's critics have said he is using the Lebanon issue to deflect attention from the Palestinian track.

Critics said any withdrawal dependent on Syrian and Lebanese acquiescence was a non-starter.

"If the plan means leaving Lebanon only on condition of an agreement with Lebanon and Syria, regretfully it will not happen," said legislator Yossi Beilin from the opposition Labour Party and a leading advocate of a unilateral withdrawal.

Face-lift for Hanging Church

As restoration work continues on the Hanging Church, long submerged monuments, such as the gate of Amr Ibn Al-'Aas, above, are reappearing. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

Visitors to the Hanging Church in Old Cairo this Easter will be treated to an unexpected scene. Piles of sand, equipment and machinery are in the backyard of the 4th century church and the adjacent Coptic Museum, indicating that an ambitious restoration programme is underway.

The project, which will take 20 months and cost LE23 million, involves more than 500 workers, engineers and antiquities experts.

The deteriorating condition of the church had forced its pastor, Father Morqos Aziz, to file a lawsuit against the government last year, complaining of what he called "deliberate negligence" — a charge that was hotly denied by antiquities officials.

The restoration programme, begun a few weeks ago, is "a sign that the government cares about the national heritage, regardless of religion," Culture Minister Farouk Hosni said. "We are restoring a most important monument that figures prominently in Egyptian history and that is home to a rare collection of icons and frescos."

The church is built on a spot which, according to legend, was part of the route taken by the Holy Family during the flight to Egypt. It rests atop the two southwestern bastions of the Roman fortress of Babylon. Threatened by subterranean water and poor drainage, the church suffered additional damage from the October 1992 earthquake. As a result, columns began to lean and the ground began subsiding.

According to Nabil Abdel-Samie, the engineer in charge of the project, the major challenge in the restoration programme is the "de-watering" work — bringing down the level of subterranean water.

"The first stage of the project focuses on bringing down the water-level below the church and the fort," Abdel-Samie told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. This, he added, should be done very carefully because a failure of the church's foundations could threaten the whole church with collapse.

Consequently, special techniques and state-of-the-art equipment are being used for the first time. Electronic sensors have been attached to the most serious of some 150 cracks that have appeared in the church's walls and ceiling. "These sensors are linked to computers which record the movement of the cracks every hour," said Attiya Bekheit Aziz, survey control manager of the project. "This allows us to monitor the movement of the cracks while the de-watering process is going on, so that we may know whether this process is adversely affecting the foundations."

As the water-level is reduced, archaeological components of the church which have been submerged for years under layers of mud are seeing the light of day. These include five marble steps leading down to the quay where Roman boats once moored.

"These steps were last seen in 1882," said Abdel-Samie. "They appear in the old maps of the fortress but they have been covered by water since then."

Another archaeological component that has re-emerged is a gate below the church, which has come to be known as the gate of Amr Ibn Al-'Aas, the Arab conqueror of Egypt. Before the restoration work began, only the upper wooden parts were visible while the remainder of the iron gate remained submerged.

The restoration programme will be completed at the beginning of the year 2000, in time for celebrations marking the start of the third millennium.

"We should be able to win a large chunk of the world's religious tourism, as we approach the year 2000, because Egypt is home to many sites where the Holy Family took shelter," an antiquities official said. "The Hanging Church is one of them."

The restoration programme, which also involves work on an annex of the Coptic Museum and the remains of a Roman wall, is part of a larger scheme to preserve the monuments of Old Cairo. The government has given its stamp of approval to a scheme by the American Research Centre to turn the area, which includes the Amr Ibn Al-'Aas Mosque, the Coptic churches around it and the Synagogue of Ben Ezra, into the world's first complex of monotheistic religions. Restoration work on the synagogue was completed recently and is continuing at the mosque.

The next targets for restoration will be the other mosques and churches in the area, said Abdallah El-Attar, head of the Islamic monuments department at the Supreme Council of Antiquities.





In talks to save the peace process, President Hosni Mubarak meets with US envoy Dennis Ross and with Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid in Sharm El-Sheikh

Congressional bill arouses Copts' ire

A US Congressional committee has voted for sanctions to be imposed on countries found guilty of religious persecution. **Hoda Tewfik**, from Washington, reports on the controversial bill and in Cairo, **Omayma Abdel-Latif** gauges the Copts' reaction

The House International Relations Committee voted 31-5 last week in support of a controversial bill that seeks to stem religious persecution worldwide. The bill could lead to the imposition of sanctions against dozens of America's allies, friends and trading partners.

The committee approval was the first step in the process of the passage of the so-called Freedom from Religious Persecution Act, to which the Clinton administration is strongly opposed.

The bill must now go to the Committee on Banking, the Judiciary Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee. It is not expected to come to the House floor until mid-May.

The bill did not gain immediate and unconditional support from members of the International Relations Committee. During a lengthy debate, several legislators raised objections with some saying that the use of sanctions against other countries was extreme.

As a result, two amendments were introduced. The first introduced the office of religious persecution, to be located at the State Department. Its director will determine which countries actively persecute members of a particular religious group, which permit such activity and which actively oppose such persecution. The director would recommend sanctions to the secretary of state against offending countries. If the sanctions are approved, such countries would be barred from receiving US exports.

The president could waive the sanctions for no longer than a year for reasons of national security or if he determines that such a waiver "will substantially promote the purpose of the legalisation."

A senior State Department official warned that "even the threat of sanctions, which might ultimately be waived by the president, could undermine delicate US foreign policy calculations."

The second amendment shifted the responsibility for determining sanctions from the office director to the secretary of state, and deleted the names of a long list of countries accused of practising religious persecution.

Still, a long road lies ahead before the bill gains final Congressional approval.

The Clinton administration first expressed opposition to the bill last year. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sent a letter to the committee explaining the political and economic damage the US could suffer if the bill was approved. The letter was sent before the bill was amended.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Frank R. Wolf and Sen. Arlen Specter. The draft was authored by Michael Horowitz, a top budget official during the Reagan administration.

Rep. Malt Salmon, who opposes the bill, said that Washington should look at religious persecution on a case-by-case basis, rather than within the broad outlines of the bill.

"It is as if we believe we can legislate a change in the human heart," Salmon said.

Horowitz, a one-time Yeshiva University student, aroused the wrath of Christian groups over reports that fellow Christians abroad are being persecuted for their faith. Both sides have led a crusade. The campaign triggered fierce opposition from the foreign policy establishment and the business community, whose representatives argued that economic sanctions rarely accomplish anything other than cause US companies to lose out to foreign competitors. Indeed, a coalition of more than 600 companies and trade associations was formed under the name USA-Engage to lobby against the use of sanctions.

"It is clearly the wrong tool for promoting religious tolerance," said Frank Kittredge, president of the National Foreign Trade Council.

He noted that the National Council of Churches recognises that the legislation could ultimately do more harm than good.

Committee Chairman Benjamin Gilman said the bill sends "a long-overdue signal to repressive governments that continued religious persecution will not go unpunished."

Prominent Coptic figures, responding to the American bill, vowed to oppose any US attempt to meddle in their affairs and called for a national dialogue to address any problems within a domestic framework.

Fahmi Nashed, a lawyer who represents the liberal Wafd Party in the Shura Council, accused the US Congress of bowing to Zionist pressure. "Since the Islamic conquest of Egypt 14 centuries ago, Muslims and Christians have been closely united, as one force, against many enemies, ranging from the Crusaders and the French to the Israeli aggression. This aggression continues to target Egypt because of its staunch defence of Arab rights," Nashed told the council last Sunday.

Nashed said that Egyptians were the first to raise the national unity motto: 'Religion for God and the Homeland for All.'

"We raised this slogan during the 1919 Revolution when we were able to foil Britain's attempt to drive a wedge between Copts and Muslims. But it seems that the US Congress has not read this page of Egypt's history," Nashed said.

Nashed also lashed out against Coptic expatriates living in the United States for disseminating false information about the alleged persecution of Copts in Egypt.

Presidential Adviser Osama El-Baz, in an interview published on Sunday by the London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat*, rejected allegations that Copts were treated as second-class citizens or denied their rights. "Copts have the same rights and duties as Muslims," El-Baz said.

On Tuesday, the newspaper *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, published a full-page "statement to the nation", and signed by 92 people, mostly Coptic journalists, historians, university professors and businessmen.

"We don't deny that Copts are facing problems to which attention should be paid and we urge officials to solve these problems, but only within an Egyptian framework," the statement said. "We reject US interference because this will adversely affect the historic relationship between Copts and Muslims."

Many Coptic figures, speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, shared the same sentiments. "The irony of it all is that the US claims to defend religious freedom — by threatening to impose sanctions," said Samir Morqos, secretary-general of the Middle East Churches Council.

Morqos said he traced the anti-Egypt campaign in the US to 1995 when a Zionist lawyer, Michael Horowitz, published an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, urging the US administration to defend Christians living in Islamic countries who are banned from exercising their religious rights.

In the months that followed, literature on the persecution issue began to build up, Morqos said. "The Zionist connection in this affair cannot be ignored. Those who launched the campaign have connections with the Christian Union Foundation, an organisation which is completely supportive of Israel."

According to Youssef Sedhom, editor-in-chief of *Watani*, Egypt's only Coptic newspaper, the campaign aims at weakening the state system and the national church while imposing American hegemony.

"It should be made clear that the Islamic countries, and Arab countries in particular, which are home to strong national church establishments, will come under pressure to allow missionaries to work freely," Sedhom said. "This is part of a plan to revive the traditional relationship between economy, culture and religion."

A US Embassy source in Cairo conceded that the bill amounts to "interference" in the domestic affairs of other countries and said that the Clinton administration opposes it strongly. He also said that the imposition of sanctions was "impractical".

The source denied, however, that recent meetings between a US Embassy officer and some Islamic and Coptic figures were related to the new law.

Despite the administration's opposition to the bill, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has instructed US embassies to pay greater attention to violations of religious freedom.

In a document made available to the *Weekly*, Albright said: "We have asked our embassies to provide more frequent, more systematic and more sensitive reporting on religious issues and we are rewarding officers who make this a priority."

Albright said the administration has established the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad to help it better understand the problems of persecution. She thanked Congress for its interest in the issue.

Father Youhanna Qolta, a spokesman for the Coptic Catholic Church, said that he was not surprised by the American bill because Congress is under Zionist influence. "We want to tell them that they can make whatever decisions they want but we Christians are going to be protected by our Muslim brothers who are our partners in history and land," he said.

Father Antonios El-Baramousi, a spokesman for Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church, said that any Coptic problems should be solved within a national framework and not under the US umbrella. He also condemned the advertisements published by Coptic expatriates in American newspapers, saying "They only cause a bad reaction. We try to solve our problems through love and good relations, not through conflict."

Morqos called for a "national initiative by all political and intellectual trends, including the Islamic political and intellectual movements, to help solve the day-to-day problems of Copts by affirming the equality of citizens and the fact that Copts are a key component of the national family, and not a minority."

Another Coptic figure, Labib Helmi, deputy chairman of the State Council, suggested, in an open letter to President Hosni Mubarak, the establishment of a committee of prominent Copts to respond to allegations of persecution.

"A committee should be formed to put the issue of national unity in its historic perspective and affirm Egypt's experience since time immemorial of the co-existence between the two elements of the nation," Helmi said.

Revitalising the press code

Journalists now have a code of ethics but renowned writers, speaking to **Shaden Shehab**, question whether the covenant alone will check "the yellow press"

As the battle against "the yellow press" continues, the *Press Syndicate* has vowed to enforce a code of ethics that was approved by the Supreme Press Council last Thursday. "The syndicate will not allow any violation of the code," said Chairman Makram Mohamed Ahmed. "If journalists show respect for the code, then there is a lot of hope that the yellow press will be cut down to size."

The code has remained dormant since it was first drafted by the syndicate in 1996. It was revived only when the government showed concern over sensational news published by some newspapers that have limited circulation.

Ahmed said that readers should now realise that, instead of going to court with their complaints, they can turn to the syndicate. "In this situation, journalists will not have to go to jail for publication offences," he added. Ahmed said that the "most appropriate means of punishing violators" is to expel them from the syndicate. In this way, they would forfeit their right to work in journalism.

The code of ethics requires the Press Syndicate Council to study readers' complaints. If a journalist is proven to have violated the code, he will face an investigative committee that must study his case in no more than 30 days. If he is found guilty, the journalist will then face a disciplinary board that will decide the appropriate penalty. The punishment will begin with a reprimand, to be followed, if necessary, by a fine, a one-year suspension from work in journalism or expulsion from the syndicate.

The code prohibits journalists from levelling unjust accusations or exposing the private lives of citizens with the purpose of slander. A journalist who wishes to print a correction sent by a reader should publish the correction in a space in the newspaper equal to the space of the original story.

Salah Eissa, a former member of the syndicate's council, said enforcing the code of ethics will have "positive results" but he questioned whether the covenant is enough. "The code will reduce the number of journalists facing trial," Eissa said. He explained that readers now take their complaints to a prosecutor who puts the offending journalist on trial. "Courts now prefer to send journalists to jail instead of ordering them to pay a fine," he said. "If people find another outlet for their complaints, they will use it. Nobody likes a trial which is time-and-money consuming."

But Eissa and Salama Ahmed Salama, a highly-respected columnist for *Al-Ahram*, said the code would not stand on its own. The two pointed out that the 1996 Press Law requires the Supreme Press Council to issue reports on newspapers that "deviate from professional ethics." In turn, newspapers are required to publish excerpts from these reports. Consequently, any newspaper that cares about its readership and credibility will refrain from any wrongdoing since they will be publicly exposed, Eissa and Salama argued.

"It all depends on how the code will be enforced," said Laila Abdel-Meguid, a professor of mass communications in Cairo University. "As in many countries, the code of ethics is not implemented because nobody cares about implementing it."

She said that journalists should be acquainted with the provisions of the code and debate them at an extraordinary general assembly of the syndicate. "Then the syndicate's council should decide the appropriate steps to implement it seriously. Once readers realise that the syndicate is serious about its implementation, the code could prove to be the solution for getting rid of the yellow press," Abdel-Meguid said.

Counsellor Yehia Rifai, former head of the Judges' Association, said the code of ethics "will not prevent people from going to court with their complaints even if it is taken seriously by the Press Syndicate."

But he said the Press Law should be amended. "Prosecutors should not be allowed to put an offending journalist on trial if the victim does not send him a correction with the facts," Rifai said.

Selection only for top police brass

The People's Assembly has approved a new law that makes selection the basis of promotion to the rank of police brigadier-general. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

The Interior Ministry surprised the People's Assembly last week by suggesting modifications to the law regulating the performance of the police forces. The new bill originally proposed that promotion to the ranks of police colonel and brigadier-general be a matter of discretion, and not simply an automatic consequence of seniority, as under the old law. But faced by opposition from several parliamentarians, the draft was modified so that only promotion to the rank of brigadier-general will be selective. Officers who fail to achieve promotion to this rank will be retired. Promotion to the highest rank of major-general is already discretionary. The new bill also provides for harsh penalties against active and retired police officers who divulge information they acquired in the course of their work.

According to an explanatory note, the new law, an amendment of Law 109 for 1971, has a number of objectives. The first, the note said, is to make it possible for the Interior Ministry to get rid of those "negative elements" who violate the values and ethics governing the performance of the police authority. This will be achieved by giving the police authority, with the interior minister at its head, greater control over which officers are promoted to higher ranks, the note said.

According to the new law, promotion up to the rank of colonel will continue to be based on seniority. But promotion to the rank of brigadier-general will be discretionary, and those officers who are not promoted at this point will be retired. "This means," the note said, "that the police authority will have greater powers to choose the best police officers for promotion to the ranks of brigadier-general and major-general."

Interior Minister Habib El-Adli, addressing the Assembly's national security committee on 23 March, said the main objective behind expanding the police authority's powers was to make it possible for the Interior Ministry to get rid of "bad elements." "I had a meeting with a large number of top police officers," El-Adli said. "I told them that in each profession there are good and bad elements. I explained to them that there are relatively few deviant and bad elements in the police force; in my position as interior minister, I'm quite well-informed about the extent of deviation in other professions. But I also told them that while deviation in the police force is very limited, it is plain for all to see. This is why the new law is designed to help us get rid of the bad elements."

Some parliamentarians, however, expressed the fear that the new law would create a widespread feeling of frustration among police officers. Mamdouh Foda, an MP for Daqahliya Governorate, argued that the new system of promotion could be used arbitrarily to force "good elements" out of the police force.

Abdel-Moneim El-Oleimi, an MP for Gharbiya, said that police officers who were denied promotion and retired should be informed of the reasons and also given the right to contest the decision. "Police officers who are retired should be given substantial financial compensation because they have families to feed," Oleimi said.

Responding to these remarks, El-Adli affirmed that the main objective of the new law is to ensure that top police officers are highly efficient individuals. "I will not be importing efficient police brigadiers from abroad. This law is simply aimed at keeping the good elements in and forcing the bad ones out," El-Adli said.

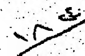
He assured the deputies that officers who are retired will receive very satisfactory financial compensation. "I attach great importance to this point, because I want all of them to lead a financially comfortable life," he said.

During the final debate on the new bill on 26 March, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Kamal El-Shazli announced that the government has agreed to introduce modifications to the draft. "Following last night's debate, the interior minister and myself decided to convey your remarks about some of the law's provisions to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri because we all, opposition and majority, aim to serve the public interest. During our discussion with the prime minister, the interior minister proposed a compromise that meets your demands," Shazli said.

For his part, El-Adli announced that Article 17 will be modified to make promotion up to the rank of colonel continue to be based on seniority. Besides, Adli added, Article 19 will also be amended to make the period of service in the rank of colonel two years, instead of one year as in the original draft. This period can be extended on an annual basis. "We introduced these amendments because we, like you, are keen to serve the interests of police officers who are our sons and brothers," El-Adli said.

According to the explanatory note, the law is also aimed at tightening the Interior Ministry's control on the information in its possession. "Lately, a number of police officers have been involved in divulging top secret information and documents concerning security matters," the note said. "Although Article 42 of the current police authority law bans active and retired police officers from disclosing secret information, yet it failed to specify the scope of this ban. The ban did not apply, for instance, to the activities of the police authority itself, and no penalties were specified for violating this ban."

Under the new law, the note explained, active and retired police officers are prohibited — unless they have the written approval of the interior minister — from disclosing directly or indirectly any information they acquired in the course of their work. Offenders will be liable to a prison term and a fine ranging between LE5,000 and 10,000. The law gives the interior minister the right to apply harsher or lighter penalties as he sees fit.



Boom around the corner

Aziza Sami meets a senior USAID official happy to talk up the Egyptian economy

The Egyptian economy is on the verge of a boom according to Ambassador Sally Shelton, assistant administrator for Global Programs at the US Agency for International Development.

"There is tremendous progress in creating a business-friendly environment. Egypt has been placed by [international financial institutions] on the list of important emerging markets, which is a very positive sign. Within the next few years, we are going to see an economic boom in Egypt," she said.

Affirming the "need to invest in education", Shelton disclosed that Mrs Suzanne Mubarak has been invited to attend a three-day conference on "Education for Girls", sponsored by the US government, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, scheduled for 6 May.

Shelton, who holds the position of deputy director of USAID in addition to co-chairing the US-Egyptian Partnership's Subcommittee on Education and Human Resource Development, visited Cairo this week in preparation for Vice-President Al Gore's visit scheduled for 3 May.

She said that the repeated delays in Vice-President Gore's visit to Egypt were not due to political considerations, or to problems related to the Egypt-US Presidents' Council, formed under the Mubarak-Gore Initiative, but were simply the result "of scheduling problems".

US-Egyptian Partnership cooperation was progressing well through its four-sub committees, said Shelton. "It may not be producing a dramatic outcome, but behind the scenes, whether in the environment or human development subcommittee, we are making good progress." Shelton, who is mandated by the US Senate to oversee USAID programmes worldwide, has held senior positions in both the US government and major financial institutions.

On the prospective reduction of US economic assistance to Egypt, Shelton said: "Our assistance programme, which we have worked out with the Egyptian government 1000 per cent, will be phased down. We will focus and reduce in some sectors which have been pretty successful and no longer need our help, and really prioritise on others."

Shelton would not specify which sectors were candidates for aid reduction first, saying "we have barely begun to plan for the future."

American investments in Egypt have increased, said Shelton, but added that "there will be much more investment when Egypt opens up its economy, by reducing its tariff barriers, streamlining the customs process, continuing privatisation and ensuring there is a transparent financial sector and a vibrant capital market, and that is already being done."

She stressed the "need to invest in education as well because for Egypt to compete as a market is not a purely economic issue. One of the concerns you hear among investors is the inadequate skills' level [in the Egyptian market]. We at USAID are working very closely with the Egyptian government to try to help resolve this issue," she said.

Arabs coordinate war against terrorism

Eleven years after the idea was first floated, Arab countries are on the verge of finalising a treaty to combat terrorism. But, as **Amira Ibrahim** finds out, some snags remain

Arab interior and justice ministers, at a joint meeting scheduled for 22 April in Cairo, are due to sign their first treaty for cooperation in the war against terrorism. But in the past, some Arab countries had expressed reservations about such an accord and there is a possibility they may refrain from signing.

The treaty lays down guidelines for security coordination, the exchange of information and the extradition of terrorists.

The idea of the treaty was first floated in 1987, at the Council of Arab Interior Ministers, but concrete action on drafting the pact began only four years ago. Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Nagui, director of the council's information office, said efforts to crystallise a joint Arab strategy for combatting terrorism were interrupted by the 1991 Gulf War.

"Even when the council resumed its meetings in 1992, it could not agree on a joint security strategy because some countries opposed the idea while others expressed reservations," he said.

Two years later, Egypt submitted a comprehensive plan to the council on fighting terrorism, but failed to gain unanimous support. Some countries, including Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, favoured inter-Arab security coordination. Others continued to oppose the idea or expressed reservations.

In 1995, the former group managed to garner enough support and succeeded in placing the issue of terrorism on the council's agenda. But it was only in 1996, as a result of a change of policy by the Gulf states, that Egypt won approval for a code of conduct which it submitted to the council.

The treaty draws a distinction between terrorism and a people's right to resist foreign occupation and struggle for self-determination, Nagui said.

Under the treaty, signatories will be obligated to exchange information and cooperate in judicial procedures, inspections, investigations and the apprehension of terrorists. Cooperation will also extend to joint studies and researches to combat terrorist acts. The treaty spells out the methods used in extraditing terrorists, whether through diplomatic channels or the ministries of justice of the countries concerned, Nagui added.

It is uncertain whether all Arab countries will sign the treaty when it is presented at the 22 April conference. Some have reservations regarding terminology while others remain opposed to the very concept of security coordination.

Some countries, including Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Palestine, are eager to turn the treaty into reality. Others, like Iraq, Lebanon and Morocco, whose positions range from refusal to caution, argue that they do not have a terrorism problem. This group also includes Sudan, which insists that a distinction be drawn between terrorism and Islamic-related activities. A third group, mainly the Gulf states, takes a middle-of-the-road approach.

Fouad Allam, a former head of the Egyptian Interior Ministry's anti-terrorism department, said he believed that the seeds of extremism exist in all Arab countries, threatening some of them with the same fate as that of Algeria.

"The main features of extremist groups are the same in all Arab states, with no single exception," Allam said. "Terrorism exists even in those countries which claim that they are not affected by terrorism. Perhaps it is not active but it is there, lurking."

Allam argued that the treaty, if applied seriously, could prove embarrassing to Western governments, which provide refuge to militants. "These countries allow militants to operate on their soil as long as their actions are directed against other states," he said. "If the treaty commits Arab countries to a unified position against those states that provide refuge to militants, this may force Western countries to reconsider their position."

But Allam attached greater importance to reaching a formula for confronting the ideology of militant groups. "There is a serious need to correct the wrong ideas these groups have, which came as a result of mistaken interpretations of religious texts," he said. "Exposing those bogus beliefs is as necessary as a security cooperation treaty."

Allam said the treaty should not be restricted to the extradition of militants. "It should stipulate a commitment by all signatories to halt all activities of militant groups on their soil. Otherwise, it would not be as fruitful as we would all wish," he added.

"Terrorist groups receiving support from external sources have grown into strong, organised bodies that are well-armed and trained. I doubt that some Arab governments are willing to get involved in action against them," Allam said.

Islamist lawyers denied entry to Britain

Is Britain ready to cooperate in the war against terrorism? **Amira Howeidy** gauges reactions to the British Embassy's refusal to grant entry visas to three Islamist lawyers

The British Embassy in Cairo officially informed three Islamist lawyers last Sunday that their applications for visiting the United Kingdom to attend a controversial conference had been turned down for political reasons. According to an embassy official, the applications were rejected because "we have reason to believe the conference the applicants wanted to attend is linked to the Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya."

The three lawyers, Montasser El-Zayyat — de facto spokesman for Al-Gama'a — Abdel-Halim Mandour and Salah Hashem, all applied for entry visas to the UK last week to attend a human rights conference organised by an Islamist group operating in London.

"Unlike the previous times we applied for entry visas to Britain, we were subjected to unusual, provocative and offending procedures by embassy officials," El-Zayyat told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "They informed us that our papers will be sent to the British Foreign Office, which will make the decision this time. A few days later, we learned that our applications were rejected."

Edward Webb, press attaché at the British Embassy, told the *Weekly* that the decision was based on "information from the press, namely [the London-based] *Al-Hayat* and other sources," that the conference is linked to the terrorist Al-Gama'a. Asked if the decision meant that persons with connections to the group are banned from entering Britain, Webb responded: "I cannot speculate on that." But he pointed out that it is the Al-Gama'a link to the conference, rather than the persons attending it, that is their concern. He confirmed news reports that the applications of Islamists in other countries to attend the same conference were also rejected.

Webb insisted that Britain was "always strongly opposed to and combatted terrorism in the past as well as in the present." But observers believe the British action was in response to charges, made following last November's massacre in Luxor, that the UK provided refuge to terrorists. At the time, high Egyptian officials singled out Britain for criticism on the grounds that the alleged masterminds of the slaughter were allowed to operate freely in London. Moreover, Egypt submitted a request to the British government for the extradition of a number of wanted militants, but never received an answer. And former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi took Britain to task for allowing terrorists to hold annual conferences that threaten the security of Egypt and other countries on its soil.

"The Egyptian government has been complaining for years about the activities of certain Islamists in Britain without getting any response," said Diaa Rashwan, an expert on Islamist militancy. He argued that the British decision to turn down the lawyers' applications for entry visas was a direct result of the Luxor massacre.

"It is simply because the blood in Luxor is not dry yet," Rashwan said. "After Luxor, things changed and the British were placed in an embarrassing situation for offering asylum to wanted militants, such as Yasser El-Serri, and for allowing activists to hold undesirable conferences, such as the latest one. By placing obstacles before the organisers, they are sending the right message that they are actually doing something."

The London conference has been postponed indefinitely. But Rashwan cautioned that the simple action of refusing entry visas to figures like El-Zayyat "results only in media attention and serves as a tranquiliser and a good method to save face."

Rashwan warned that this is still only a partial measure. Had the British government really changed its policies, he said, it would have turned over the wanted militants to Egypt. "But this is not the case. There is no real change, particularly since the group organising this conference is unknown and remains insignificant compared to the larger and more powerful networks operating in the West," said Rashwan.

Responded Webb: "We have no power to stop conferences from taking place... and we have to act within the framework of our law, but we can place obstacles such as refusing applications... and if the conference is to take place, we will observe it closely as Britain should not be used for any terrorist activity."

So, should the British decision be viewed as a prelude to greater cooperation with Egypt in the war against terrorism? "We are happy to know that the British government is taking action, any action, that helps combat terrorism," a source at the Interior Ministry told the *Weekly*. "It is obvious that this response is coming as a result of the Luxor massacre. We welcome any progress and steps taken to fight this phenomenon."

Asked if Britain is ready to extradite the militants wanted by Egypt, Webb said: "Refusing visas is something and extradition is another issue. We do not have an extradition treaty with Egypt. We only have one request from the Egyptian government which we have had for some time."

But Webb said that cooperation with the Egyptian government has been "very real indeed and ever increasing, more than is apparent."

Searching for mercy



Since nurse Aida was condemned to death, the city of Alexandria has been struggling to come to terms with the sentence. Is she really guilty or are there other forces at work? **Fatemah Farag** joins those who are searching for answers

Alexandria is in a state of shock following the death sentence passed on Aida Noureddin, a nurse at the Alexandria University Hospital, for the murder of one of her patients and the attempted murder of 29 others. "Even if she is guilty, there must be many others who share the responsibility," said Mohamed Ashour, a taxi driver, summing up the general feeling of the city.

At a coffee-shop a man leans over and points out: "She is just a nurse who doesn't have much authority anyway... It's the big people." This term — "the big people" — pops up whenever the case is discussed and is usually accompanied by a knowing look or some other facial expression. No one gives any specifics, but everyone seems to know exactly what they are talking about.

The feeling that there is something wrong was vividly expressed by the demonstrations which took place last Thursday outside the courthouse after the death sentence was pronounced. "There were hundreds of people on the streets and they were very angry as they started to move towards the governorate building," said Oweiss who works at a coffee-shop near the courthouse. At the University Hospital, Aida's colleagues staged a three-day strike that ended on Sunday. "On the first day we actually broke out of the gates and started to move towards the governorate building, but we were pushed back. On the following days we stayed within the gates but the police continued their harsh crack down to disband the strike," said a young nurse.

At first glance, it looks like business as usual at the hospital. Long queues of patients line up in front of the main gate, and inside there is the habitual turmoil. The presence of a few Central Security policemen, armed with long sticks, and the scowls on the faces of the nurses, are the first clue to the tension under the surface. "We are very upset," said a nurse who has been working at the hospital for 31 years. "We have so many problems as it is and now this. The fate of any nurse here is the fate of Aida and so something must be done." Emad Nabawi, a lawyer at the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA) in Alexandria, points out that "the court has the jurisdiction to press charges against other people, but that would open up the whole file of the public health system. Who is willing to open this file?"

But Adel Eid, Aida's lawyer, disagreed. "These are people who are just trying to outbid us. There is a difference between administrative negligence and the case of Aida who was convicted of murder." Hence, the points Eid intends to stress in the next round of proceedings, which will take place before the Court of Cassation: Aida did not intend to kill anyone; the procedures of her interrogation were illegal because of a delay in informing the prosecutor that she had been taken into custody; Aida was under psychological pressure during the interrogation; and there are contradictions between the technical reports and the official coroner's report.

Aida's confession to murder under police interrogation and the coroner's report on the patient whom she allegedly killed are "the major documents which stand against her," said Eid. As one nurse from the neurology department put it, "there are some departments which have very high mortality rates, like ours. It is well-known that when patients leave here, they're either dead or in some way disabled." Shahdan El-Gharbawi, an Alexandria lawyer who works for CHRLA, said: "We have dozens of malpractice cases which we cannot take to court." Pointing at a shelf behind her loaded with yellow folders, she added: "It is very difficult to get a conclusive report from the coroner's office against another doctor. But the cases show that there are a lot of mistakes taking place."

If the Court of Cassation rules in favour of Aida, there will be a re-trial. If the retrial leads to a verdict of unpremeditated murder or manslaughter, the death sentence will be reduced to imprisonment.

Mohamed, Aida's brother, sits tensely on the edge of his seat in his small flat in the working-class area of Hadra, pulling continuously on his cheap cigarettes. He can detail every event that has occurred since the day the police came to arrest his sister. "There are some things I will never be able to forget, like the terror in her eyes when we went to see her at the police station, and her bruised face with her hair all over the place when we went to see her at the hospital," he said. Her family is understandably devastated. The father does not meet reporters any more because the mere mention of her name reduces him to tears. Her mother is in Cairo and, according to Mohamed, she does not yet know the verdict. "It will kill her," he said, tears in his eyes.

He recounts how he and his father took Aida to the Sidi Gaber police station. "The officer swore on the Qur'an that she would be all right and then they took her, without us knowing, to the Montaza station, which has no jurisdiction either over our area or the hospital, and when we finally found out the next day that she had been moved, it was to discover that she was seriously hurt." Mohamed claims that his sister had been terrified to the point of confession. "When the prosecutor went to her accompanied by the police officers, she said 'all I want is for you to leave me alone'."

Mohamed finds solace in the people who have stood by his sister. "When I heard the verdict I started crying, and then I saw all those people angry and shouting her name... I felt that there are things which are still good in life."

Although the issue of torture was never brought up during the trial and Eid confirmed that Aida never told him that she had been physically abused, colleagues who saw her when she was admitted into hospital, after she threw herself out of a police station window, claim that she was mistreated. One of them said: "I saw her and she was so scared, so broken up. What else could you do if you were in her position but agree to anything anyone asked of you?"

Aida's fate has scared some nurses to the point of resignation; others are simply angry. A group of nurses complained about their salaries which average LE170 and the facts that there are no transportation facilities, difficult hours which are incompatible with household duties, bad treatment by doctors and no decent nursery for their children. "We curse ourselves for being in this profession, but what can we do? We need to work," said one indignant nurse before stomping off to see to a patient, adding over her shoulder: "People only come to us when they want to blame us, but they never come to listen to our problems, to see how they could improve our performance and our lives."

The consensus among hospital nurses is that they should not be held responsible for mistakes, not only because of their difficult working conditions, but also because they are not in a position of any real power. "We cannot get drugs from the hospital pharmacy without getting a doctor's signature on the ticket and we only administer drugs which are on the emergency tray," one of them said. A young nurse added furtively: "Some doctors working on their Master's or PhD will come in with a medicine they are experimenting with and ask us to administer it, and then we have no choice but to do as we are asked."

Further, although their diplomas only qualify nurses to give sub-cutaneous and intramuscular shots, in actual practice nurses also find themselves making injections into the jugular vein. As one nurse heatedly explained: "We will have a patient in a critical condition and then search for the doctor and not find anyone, or we call him and he tells us over the phone what to do until he comes in the next day... So should we let the patient die or should we try and do something?"

Aida is remembered by her colleagues as a diligent worker who was dedicated to her job. "I remember that she once gave her blood to a patient who was undergoing an operation and she almost fainted as a result. No one remembers these things now," a colleague said.

But the nurses remember, and so, it would seem, do many others. That is why they say they were demonstrating last Thursday: because they want to see more people taking responsibility for the deaths, and if necessary, behind bars. As for Aida, in the words of one old nurse, "the angels of mercy are searching for mercy."

'My house, my life'

As the government moves forward with its plans to develop Cairo, those dispossessed of their homes complain that compensation procedures are too slow

Ard-Al-Liwa is a poor neighbourhood located near the posh district of Mohandessin. Within Ard-Al-Liwa, there is an even poorer section, called Zarayeb, which is inhabited mainly by garbage collectors. Ever since the planners of the Cairo Ring Road fixed Zarayeb in their sites, the luck of the impoverished inhabitants has been shifting steadily from bad to worse, reports **Fatemah Farag**. Many of those who live there now seem destined to be dispossessed of their homes not just once, but twice.

The first time was in 1993-94. "The government came and told us the ring road was going through here and that we had to demolish our houses," said *Aam* Moussa who owns a three-storey building in Zarayeb. "We agreed and we pulled our houses down, moving further out to places the Survey Authority said were safe." As he talked, people pointed towards the remains of the old houses.

Two weeks ago, officials from the Survey Authority visited Zarayeb again and told the inhabitants that the road was to be extended by an additional 200 metre. The new houses, too, will therefore have to come down. "Imagine if you were in my position and you had rebuilt your home at your own expense and still not received compensation for your first house... How would you feel and what would you do?" Moussa continued heatedly.

Tensions rise in Zarayeb as government officials go about their business of measuring up the houses in preparation for issuing eviction notices. One engineer walking behind a long line of central security forces — who are there to ensure the peace is not disturbed — wears a face mask to keep out the copious amounts of dust. (There are no paved roads in Zarayeb.)

This approach is not going down well with the inhabitants who work as garbage collectors serving nearby areas in Giza. "It is all right if we live like this and our children get sick because of the pollution. The government only remembers us when it wants to evict us," said Nabawiya Ali with a smirk.

People are very proud of the fact that they have built the area themselves. "When we first came there was nothing here. Slowly we built our own schools and houses and paid for electricity and water to be brought in," says Maurice.

According to the terms of Laws 577/1954 and 10/1990, citizens who have their property taken from them for purposes of public benefit can wait up to two years for compensation procedures to be completed. Ismail Mahmoud Shahat, head of the Central Administration for Survey Affairs, has conceded in a published interview that, due to lack of funds, delays in doling out compensation in fact stretch well beyond the stipulated two-year period.

This problem does not concern only the inhabitants of Zarayeb. People recently evicted from houses in Old Cairo were consigned to tents and in Assiut there were reports of similar difficulties a few days ago.

The inhabitants of Zarayeb are unable to see the logic of being evicted before they have received the compensation which would enable them to find alternative housing. "We can understand that this is government policy and that even if it is unfair there is little we can do to stop it. All we ask is that our fate not be the tents... that we be given a more humane option," concluded Maurice.

Khalil Abdel-Fattah shook his head sadly and recalled: "I went to Iraq and lived there for all the years of my youth so I could come back with enough money to build this house. If they pull the house down, it is like pulling down my life."

In the meantime, Central Security Forces travel daily to Zarayeb to make sure the eviction procedures move smoothly ahead, while the 4,000 families living in 500 houses await their fate.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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Algeria's answer is still no

Algeria remains consistent in rejecting proposals for an international inquiry into its troubles and equally consistent in its failure to stop the waves of internal violence, writes Amira Howeidy

The Algerian government renewed this week its rejection of calls for an international inquiry into the political violence which has rocked the country since 1992.

On Sunday, the same day that Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyehia rejected the US and UN calls for investigation, he spurned another proposal by members of the Algerian parliament to lift the six-year-old state of emergency. He asserted that "the security situation is improving steadily throughout the country," but there remains a need for the emergency laws to confront violent militant groups.

Ouyehia's statement about increased security sounded farfetched in light of a fresh massacre that claimed the lives of 58 citizens over the weekend. The horrific number of victims in Algeria's six-year unrest — estimated at 26,000 by the government and 80,000 by international human rights groups — has raised great concern among the international community.

The government blames extremist militants, mainly the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), for the bloodshed, while international human rights groups and several Algerian opposition parties allege that the Algerian army might have been involved in some of the massacres, or at least has done little to stop them.

The US, UN and the European Union (EU) have repeatedly suggested sending independent experts to Algeria to inquire about the massacres. Their offers were firmly turned down by Algerian President Liamine Zeroual, who regards such offers as foreign intervention. The government also said that accepting an outside inquiry would only bolster the militants by giving credence to allegations that state security forces were responsible for some of the killings — a charge Algiers vehemently denies. The Algerian government has also rejected an offer by the European Union to provide humanitarian aid to victims of the massacres.

But Algeria relented somewhat under international pressure when it agreed in January to receive the ministers of state for foreign affairs of Britain, Luxembourg and Austria — the troika of the present, former and future presidents of the 15-nation EU — to discuss the situation in Algeria. However, the results achieved, according to British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook who chaired a recent EU meeting on Algeria, were "modest". The Algerian government was willing only to talk about "breaking terrorist networks operating in Europe" and would not listen to the mission's offer for an investigation. The Algerian government also agreed a month later to receive a European Parliament delegation. The European MPs refused to meet representatives of the now-outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and said that they found no evidence indicating government involvement in the civilian massacres.

Both the media and international community's attention later shifted to the Iraqi-US weapons inspection showdown. But as this crisis cooled off, the sound of Algerian carnage was once again heard.

Last Thursday, Bill Richardson, the US ambassador to the United Nations, called for UN experts to be allowed into Algeria to investigate recent massacres which claimed the lives of more than 300 people.

Again, his call was immediately rejected. "The number one problem in Algeria is terrorism," said Abdul-Aziz Sebaa, a spokesman for the Algerian Foreign Ministry. "The allegations that have been put forward... in no way justify intervention by special experts."

Sebaa said Algeria has just submitted its annual report on political and civic rights to the United Nations and would be open to questions once the report has been reviewed.

International human rights groups maintain that Algerian authorities may bear some responsibility for some of the massacres. But in a bid to prove the opposite, state-run Algerian TV showed footage of a military operation in the Tlemecen province in which more than 100 militants were killed. It was followed by another major operation which began last week in Relizane, 270km from Algiers, where various massacres had occurred.

Whether or not such "crackdowns" comforted critics abroad remains an open question. But back home, proponents of a UN inquiry are urging the government to take any action to eliminate the violence. The opposition Socialist Forces Front (FFS) launched a campaign and presented an official request to the parliament to lift the state of emergency which they believe is responsible for many of the human rights violations in Algeria. The emergency measures give police broad powers to detain suspects and ban rallies unless they are approved by the government.

"It is obvious from the past seven years that the emergency law is ineffective (in stopping the violence), simply because the core of the problem is political," Ali Rachdi, FFS elected MP told the *Weekly*. "If it is to continue, the state of emergency has to be constitutional, and it isn't. Therefore, it should be lifted so that individual and collective liberty is restored, to give Algerians their dignity back." Rachdi said that the FFS, which initiated the call for international intervention in Algeria last year, believes that under martial laws, independent local investigation on the massacres "is impossible".

Commenting on the recent US call for a UN investigation, Rachdi said, "The American administration repeatedly said that it supports Zeroual's policy. So how can it be genuine in questioning this policy?... We do not count on the American suggestions when it comes to foreign help." Only European pressure on the Algerian government can be fruitful, he said. "The mechanisms exist; Algeria signed all the international human rights agreements which give the UN the right to send fact-finding missions to Algeria. It is simply a matter of consensus in the divided EU and some pressure," he said.

Meanwhile, the Algerians are left for now with only one option, which is to take up Ouyehia's recent advice: "I call on citizens to keep vigilant in order to safeguard the life of innocent people against terrorists who have only one purpose: cutting throats and killing people at random."

Arab inquiry

A GROUP of Arab intellectuals and human rights activists who met in Cairo recently decided to form an independent, non-governmental team to conduct fact-finding activities on the horrendous massacres taking place in Algeria. The team will seek to collect testimonies from all possible sources.

The Arab human rights activists, who met at the invitation of the Arab Regional Working Group on Human Rights and were hosted by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, called upon the Algerian government and all other parties involved to cooperate with the team and to facilitate its task inside Algeria.

A statement released by the Arab human rights activists condemned "all acts of terrorism carried out in the name of religion or any other purposes," and called the ongoing massacres in Algeria "crimes against humanity". They also asked the Algerian government "to discharge its responsibilities in protecting the security of the population."



UN teams accompanied by diplomats on their way to carry out more inspections of Iraqi presidential sites according to the February 23 agreement reached between UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz. The head of the diplomatic group monitoring the searches, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, said Tuesday the inspections of the presidential compounds will be over in a "couple of days". He added that the disarmement experts had completed by Monday night visits to six of the eight palaces Iraq agreed to open in its agreement with the UN. The two remaining palaces are in the capital, Baghdad. Iraq hopes that the UN mission will support its claims that it no longer possesses weapons of mass destruction, opening the door to the lifting of the tight seven-year-old economic sanctions. *(photo: AFP)*

'A victory nevertheless'

Debates at a Palestinian "model parliament" on women and legislation reflected the deep division between the conservative and secular camps in Palestine. Graham Usher reports from Jerusalem

Last weekend, there was a debate in the Palestinian parliament on Palestine's first "unified" Personal Status Law, applicable to both the West Bank and Gaza. Predictably, emotions ran high, especially over the thorny issue of whether Islamic *shari'a* should be "the" source of all personal status legislation in Palestinian society, or simply "one" source among others.

One deputy asked why, if at the age of 18 she could vote and receive a passport without her husband or father's permission, "do I then need the permission of a guardian as to whom I can marry?" Another deputy — a sheikh from Hebron — told her that guardianship is guaranteed in the *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) and that he could not accept a vote being taken on such an issue. Another deputy supported him: "No human assembly can allow what God has prohibited!" she yelled. The parliament's Speaker brought the proceedings to order by ruling that while the "principles" governing the Personal Status Law could be discussed, no vote would be taken at this time.

Although broadcast live on the Palestinian Al-Watan TV channel, this was not a session of the elected Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). It was the final West Bank session of the Palestinian "model" Parliament on Women and Legislation, the climax of an 18-month campaign aimed at "eradicating legal discrimination" against women in Palestinian society and "lobbying Palestinian legislators" to adopt "a civil law for personal status, alongside a developed religious law for those who choose it."

The campaign is the brainchild of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), a Palestinian NGO founded in 1991 to improve the legal and social status of Palestinian women. The aim of using a model parliament to debate this status was to "demonstrate to both women and men that the law is not some distant abstraction but a reality that affects their everyday lives," according the WCLAC project manager, Hanan Abdel-Rahman Rabbani. To this end, six workshops were set up to study existing legislation in the West Bank and Gaza, focusing on laws that discriminated against women.

Regional parliaments were then held in Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron and Gaza to formulate amendments to the existing laws. The amendments were discussed and voted on at last weekend's "central" parliament as recommendations to be submitted to the real parliament — the Palestinian Authority (PA)'s PLC — when the time for passing actual legislation comes. "We are living in a transitional phase," says Abdel-Rahman Rabbani. "Many new laws will be ratified [by the PLC] which will have an impact on the legal status of women." The model parliament "is trying to make use of this transitional period to promote and activate gender-sensitive legislation."

The campaign was a huge success, reaching some 4,000 people in the north West Bank area. But it also ran afoul of Palestine's Islamist religious establishment. Legislation governing marriage and divorce in the West Bank and Gaza is based on Islamic *shari'a*, the exclusive preserve of the Islamic religious courts. It is a status quo the Islamists want to preserve, but which the women and men involved in the model parliament are seeking to reform or replace with a civil law. Thus, at the regional parliament in Nablus, amendments to existing personal status legislation were proposed which would outlaw marriage for women under the age of 18 and ensure a division of assets between husband and wife in the case of divorce. "The parliament is not qualified to examine such matters," grumbled Sheikh Ahmad Bitawi, a leading Islamist in Nablus. "I believe foreign parties — American, European and Israeli — are behind this [model parliament] campaign against our Personal Status Law."

It was a theme amplified throughout the mosques of Nablus, Hebron and East Jerusalem, with those behind the model parliament being accused of "devil worship" and attacked as "agents of Western corruption" and advocates of "polyandry". Women in the Occupied Territories have learned not to take such vitriolic words lightly.

During the Intifada, the Islamists — and especially Hamas — had launched an extensive campaign against all manifestations of "un-Islamic behaviour", successfully turning personal decisions such as the wearing of the *hijab* into test-cases of Islamic modesty and nationalist rectitude. The result was not only instances of physical attacks on "inappropriately" attired women, but the withdrawal of many women from all forms of political activity. The WCLAC feared the model parliament campaign might have similar consequences. Fortunately, their fears turned out to have been unfounded.

"We received a lot of support from the Palestinian media and Palestinian civil society generally," says Abdel-Rahman Rabbani. In response to the Islamists' campaign, secular Palestinian NGOs and the PLC defended the parliament in the name of freedom of expression. The campaign also won the blessing of such prominent political personalities as the PA's social affairs minister, Intissar Wazir (*Umm Jihad*), and higher education minister, Hanan Ashrawi. Most important of all, Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah movement threw its weight behind the parliament, denouncing "all those who attack the work of the women's centres". The final session of the parliament was opened by the PA's district governor for Ramallah, Mustafa Liftawi, and took place under the sponsorship of the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat.

Does the parliament campaign signal a change in Palestinian public opinion? "It is difficult to tell," says Abdel-Rahman Rabbani. "On the one hand, the backlash from the mosques shows that the Islamists still carry a lot of weight in Palestinian society." On the other, the fact that the parliament took place without violence and that, "for the first time", issues such as the Personal Status Law were debated openly in Palestinian society suggests that the post-Oslo era has indeed wrought changes in Palestinian public opinion. Whatever criticisms Palestinians may have of the PLO returnees, "they have made Palestinian culture more secular," admits Abdel-Rahman Rabbani. "We have a plurality of views in Palestinian society now, and a sense that it is permissible to discuss them."

This may be a small victory but, for Palestinian women, it is a victory nevertheless.

Unholy matrimony?

The recent civil marriage bill has sparked off a wide-ranging political debate in Lebanon. But, as Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut, the outcry has as much to do with the privileges of the religious establishment and the power-play of the coming presidential elections, as with the threat of "legalising prostitution"

In a country made up of a myriad of religious sects, interfaith marriages are not rare, even though still far from the norm. At present, civil matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance are governed according to religious affiliation. Those who refuse religious marriage or couples of mixed faith where neither partner wants to convert have to leave the country to undergo a civil marriage ceremony. On their return, the marriage is recognised by the civil courts only. Should the couple file for divorce, the court will apply the law of the country in which the marriage was contracted.

It is against this background that the Lebanese cabinet recently took the country by surprise by endorsing President Elias El-Hrawi's proposal to institute voluntary civil marriage, in defiance of both Prime Minister Rafiq El-Hariri and those Muslim and Christian clergymen who regard the procedure as sacrilegious.

Since 1996, Hrawi has been pushing for the amendment of the personal status code, believing it would be a step towards eradicating sectarian attitudes and abolishing the confessional system that dominates the country's politics and administration. Under the constitution approved in the early 1940s, government posts and civil service jobs are distributed along sectarian lines.

"The civil marriage bill is a prelude to a more comprehensive project: the abolition of political sectarianism as I prepare to leave office," Hrawi told cabinet members at a recent meeting. "My proposal will help create unity, not division."

But the bill has divided Lebanese society, drawn fire from across the religious spectrum and created rifts between political allies, particularly between Hrawi and Prime Minister Hariri.

Hariri argued that he did not oppose the principle of amending the personal status code to legalise civil marriages in Lebanon, but insisted that the timing was not congenial. "The country and the region are passing through a critical stage. Lebanon is still recovering from the war and more time is needed to tackle such a divisive issue," Hariri said.

But the president, backed by Parliament Speaker and Shi'ite leader Nabih Berri, managed to secure a majority in cabinet to endorse the bill before going to the full house.

Islamic and Christian religious figures denounced the controversial bill and vowed uncompromising opposition. "We will join our efforts with those of other heads of the Christian and Islamic communities to confront this dangerous precedent in the country's history," Sunni Mufti of the Lebanese Republic Sheikh Mohamed Rashid Kabanni said. "It [the bill] is an insult to Muslims and *Shari'a*."

Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir said the bill goes against the teachings of the church. "It strays from church teachings. Whoever enters into such a marriage can no longer receive the holy sacraments."

Yet civil marriages have been registered here for many years and religious authorities have never taken action against the couples involved.

Top Shi'ite cleric, Sheikh Mohamed Mahdi Shamseddine also took a tough position against the bill, saying that it "legalises prostitution", and called upon the government to withdraw it.

Six Muslim Sunni groups have issued a statement calling the proposed law a plot to undermine Muslim religious tribunals. Protest marches were held and demonstrators carried banners that read: "Taking the bill to parliament means taking the issue into the streets."

According to the English-language Lebanese newspaper, *The Daily Star*, Christian and Muslim clerics fear the move will "distance young people from religion and curtail the powers of religious courts, the financial backbone of religious hierarchies."

This view is shared by parliament deputy Marwan Hemadeh who believes that opposition from the religious sects stems mainly from the fear that they will see their power diminish.

"Civil marriages mean less money for religious courts. They feel the role of the religious institutions will be undermined," Hemadah told the *Weekly*.

Observers believe the row between Hariri and Hrawi over the civil marriage bill is in fact a row over the presidential elections scheduled for later this year. If they are right, Hrawi's insistence on submitting the bill is an attempt to distract attention from a constitutional amendment which might be proposed to allow him and the army commander General Emile Lahoud to run for the presidency. The amendment would allow Hrawi's mandate to be extended for a second time and make civil servants eligible to run.

"This dispute has been created as part of a political calculation ahead of the presidential race. Hrawi raised the issue to respond to Hariri, who has repeatedly declared that Hrawi's mandate will not be extended," Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hizbullah, said. "Hrawi is trying to embarrass Hariri, whose recent calls for a new and more powerful president infuriated Hrawi."

Lebanese analysts believe Hrawi is trying to project a strong image to Syrian leaders and other powers who have a say in the election process.

But Hemadeh, who supports civil marriage, said Hrawi should not have put the proposal forward now. "I think he is not strong enough to carry off such a move. You need a president with stronger ties to youth," Hemadeh added.

Informed government sources said they expected the stalemate over the issue to continue. Hariri is reportedly refusing to sign the bill. But Berri has threatened to enact by-laws for the Council of Ministers to impose deadlines for endorsing draft laws and sending them to parliament, if the prime minister does not sign the proposed law.

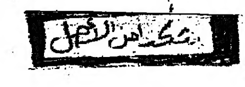
Hariri and his followers played down the endorsement saying the cabinet's decision was not final. "Cabinet only endorsed the principle of civil marriage and the law needs to be studied further in cabinet," Hariri said.

Hrawi took his battle to abolish political sectarianism a step further when he requested Berri to begin setting up a national council to do away with confessionalism in compliance with the constitution. This is being seen as an attempt to soften Berri's opposition to the prolongation of the presidential mandate. Berri has been advocating abolishing political sectarianism in his bid to gain popular support among the historically-marginalised Shi'ites of Lebanon. His backing for Hrawi's bill means that it will have a good chance of being ratified by parliament.

Official statistics say that 22 per cent of Lebanese marriages are civil ceremonies held abroad and then registered in Lebanon.

Regardless of the real intentions behind the bill, Hrawi and Berri are pushing to restructure Lebanon into a truly secular state, something it has never been since it gained its independence in the early 1940s. Their opponents, meanwhile, are clinging to the religious fault lines which almost tore the country apart during 16 years of civil war.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**







Armed Israeli soldiers pursue Palestinian stone-throwers who take position behind a wall during clashes in the West Bank town of Bethlehem this week. Clashes erupted throughout the West Bank as Palestinians marked Land Day, when Israeli army troops killed six Palestinians protesting in 1976 the expropriation of their land in Palestinian areas occupied by Israel in 1948 (photo AP)

Last ditch efforts end in monumental failure

Despite the Israeli government's denials to the contrary, it is difficult to see US special envoy Dennis Ross' latest foray to the region as anything other than a monumental failure for American diplomacy. **Graham Usher** writes

After four days — and four rounds of meetings with the Israeli prime minister — US special envoy Dennis Ross was unable to extract from Binyamin Netanyahu any specificities as to the extent of Israel's "second" West Bank redeployment. The only response from the Israeli premier was that the American proposal of a 13.1 per cent redeployment spread over three months was "unrealistic and unacceptable". Without a firm Israeli decision about the size of the redeployment, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat also reportedly refused to give Ross any detailed descriptions of the security measures the Palestinian Authority (PA) would employ to "reciprocate" any redeployment. The result was that Ross left town with nothing in his hands and nothing in his pockets. In unusually grim language, US State Department spokesman James Rubin described the peace process as being in "in dire straits".

The question the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships are pondering is what will the Americans do now. Ross's visit had been seen by both sides as a last-ditch effort to "bridge the gaps" and so avert publication of the American proposal. Given the failure of Ross' mission, there is nothing to stop the Americans' going public with their plan. There are elements of the PA leadership who would welcome this on the grounds that, since they are prepared to accept the proposal, publication would be tantamount to the US blaming Netanyahu for the breakdown in the Oslo process. For precisely the same reason, Netanyahu has said that publication of the American proposal would be seen as a "dictate" and lead to a "blow-out" of American mediation attempts. US officials are refusing to confirm whether publication is imminent, saying only that the decision will be taken once Ross consults with President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Thursday.

Should the Americans not publish their proposal, one other option is for them to "disengage" from mediating altogether.

There are signs that this is being considered. "In the absence of decisions taken by [the Israeli and Palestinian] leaders to bridge the gaps themselves, there isn't much the US can do," said Rubin on Monday. "And one option has always been for us to disengage from this kind of direct, catalytic role. But it's not an option that Secretary Albright is advocating or an option we would like to see happen at all."

It is easy to understand Rubin's reticence. "Disengagement" would basically be an admission by the Americans that its mediating role in the Oslo process is no longer credible.

That stage has not been reached yet. And, in the meantime, Arafat is working to heighten Netanyahu's diplomatic isolation.

One means to do this would be to convene a small-scale Arab summit which, given the current mood in the Arab world, would certainly issue harsh condemnations against Israel. PA ministers like Nabil Shaath are also quietly lobbying the European Union (EU) to go public with its own proposal to forward the peace process instead of, or "alongside", the American proposal. Having rejected the American's, Netanyahu is unlikely to accept any EU offer. But a European intervention would heighten the sense of crisis and aggravate further the already strained Israel-EU relations. The PA would see both as lending support to its case.

Whether such moves will force Netanyahu into undertaking a redeployment he clearly does not want is an open question.

According to Israel's *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper, there are seven members of the Israeli cabinet who are adamantly opposed to any further redeployment larger than nine per cent, including Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon. There are also at least 10 members of the Knesset — led by the far-right Land of Israel Front head, Michel Kleiner — who have pledged to bring down the government should it proceed with any further redeployment, phased or otherwise.

"Netanyahu has to choose between President Clinton and Michel Kleiner," commented Meretz leader Yossi Sarid on Monday. And so far — despite American anger, European opposition and Arab fury — Netanyahu is choosing Kleiner.

Muslim and Christian leaders in Jerusalem charge that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is acting to enforce an exclusively Jewish character on the holy city. **Khaled Dawoud** met with the Mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Ekremah Sabri, and the Latin Patriarch Michel Asaad Sabah, the first Palestinian ever to represent the Holy See in Jerusalem

As the world watches helplessly



Sheikh Ekremah Sabri



Patriarch Michel Sabah

Free access and a state

Sheikh Ekremah Sabri

Nearly five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, what is your evaluation of the peace process?

The main problem we are facing is Israeli occupation and Israel's failure to respect the agreements signed. Although the gains Palestinians have made from these agreements are very little, Israel remains defiant, and its present government acts as if it is sorry that those agreements were signed in the first place.

As for our daily suffering, there are many aspects. Last week, a child was killed in Hebron. If a Jewish child was killed, the world would have turned upside down. Over the past two years, nearly 200 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli army bullets. But nobody cares. Our pregnant women stand for hours at Israeli checkpoints, and some of them give birth while begging for permission to go from one Palestinian town to the other. Settlements are expanding everywhere: in Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Gaza. Meanwhile, the world is watching helplessly while Israel is violating all agreements.

Israel now is the source of all tension in the region.

Can you explain the measures Israel is taking to affirm its annexation of Jerusalem as its alleged "united and eternal capital"?

Israel has been working since 1967 on Judaising the city, claiming it as an exclusively Jewish capital while marginalising Islam and Christianity. Anyone who tours the city would recognise that.

There is an Israeli military siege imposed around the city, and there are several plans aimed at emptying Jerusalem of its Arab citizens. We are not allowed to build inside Jerusalem, and those who build face high taxes. Palestinians, whether Muslims or Christians, are not allowed to reach the holy prayer sites. They [Israel] want to control all religious sites in the city. All these statements you hear from Israeli officials on freedom of worship are nothing but propaganda and not the truth.

But Arab roots, Muslim and Christian, are very deep and very evident in the city of Jerusalem. Thus, and despite all the racist Israeli attempts, they were not able to realise their aggressive intentions. We are working hard to strengthen our institutions in Jerusalem, because such institutions confirm our presence in the city. We also work hard on protecting the holy sites, considering that they are another element in maintaining our presence. When Israel closes the West Bank and Gaza, we ask Palestinians in the 1948 areas to come to pray. Yet, we are still counting on Arab and Muslim support. They can do a lot to help us here.

Some Islamic scholars, such as the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, stated that armed Palestinian resistance against Israel was a legitimate means of resisting occupation. Do you agree?

I remember Sheikh Tantawi's statement in which he says that if Israel did not accept peaceful solutions and refused to implement what was agreed on, it is possible, from a religious point of view, to use arms in fighting Israel — exactly as if arms are being used in fighting against us — as a kind of self-defence.

And what is the Islamic view on suicide bomb attacks targeting Israeli civilians?

I have been asked this question many times. But I have not given an answer because the issue is very complicated and thorny. Politicians want us to give them answers which serve their interests. My answer to Israeli journalists when I was asked this question was to direct it to Yitzhak Rabin, who was prime minister at the time. I said I believed that such operations were a reaction to the occupation practices. So, instead of arguing over whether such operations were legitimate or not, let us end occupation, and these incidents will not take place.

Suicide bomb attacks kill civilians and military people. Occupation troops also kill innocent women and children. Why should we allow the Israeli army to kill innocent civilians and prevent families of the victims from responding to such crimes. Since that time, therefore, I have refused to answer. As Muslim scholars, we should not talk at the request of politicians and their demands. In some cases, silence is the answer.

The United States and Israel made a big issue out of your statements that Palestinians selling their land to Israel should be sentenced to death. Can you explain this ruling?

Selling land to Jews is prohibited since the 1917 Balfour Declaration because this helps in creating a foreign state in Palestine. Muslim scholars from Palestine, Syria, India and elsewhere in the Muslim world agreed that anyone who sells land is breaking away from the community of Muslims. Thus, if he died, we would not pray over his body and he should not be buried in Muslim cemeteries.

Yet, I would like to clarify that the real danger in this issue comes from the broker and not from the person who sells the land. In many cases, brokers fooled Palestinians and made them sign papers selling their land.

Thus, the broker is the real criminal. And in my view, he deserves capital punishment because he is endangering the country. Given that we sentence to death those who carry out a military coup, what the broker does is far more dangerous.

Patriarch Michel Sabah

What is the view of the Holy See on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

The view of the Holy See is that all peoples on earth have the same rights. No one should be superior or inferior to the other. Palestinians and Israelis should be alike, enjoy the same rights and have the same right to have a state.

But the conflict here is unlike any conflict in the world. This is the holy land, holy to Muslims, Christians and Jews. Thus, the Holy See distinguishes between two areas in this conflict: First, the issue of political sovereignty and, second, free access for all believers to the holy sites.

The Holy See is concerned to see the issue of political sovereignty solved, but I am a third party to this issue. What I am concerned with is free access. Whoever is sovereign here, I ask him to guarantee free access to all believers, at all times. But as a local church, we say that even in the issue of sovereignty, Palestinians and Israelis should enjoy equal rights. We also say that Jerusalem should have a special status, guaranteed internationally.

Jerusalem is unlike any capital in the world. It is not London, Paris or Cairo. It is a holy city which must remain open to all believers, whether in war or peace. Now, because we are not living in a period of peace, Jerusalem is open to people from several countries, but not to Palestinians.

What kind of special status does the Vatican suggest for Jerusalem?

The special status should be conceived by both people concerned, Palestinians and Israelis, because they should both govern this special status.

We need no internationalisation or other people from outside to come govern the city. It will be a local status, governed by local people, but the special status should be supported by world governments.

And what are the main problems facing Christians in terms of free access to the holy sites?

The problem we have with pilgrims is the closure imposed on Jerusalem and even on Bethlehem. In several incidents, pilgrims cannot reach Bethlehem because of security closures.

Now, Israel is talking of a quota for pilgrims. We are afraid that this quota will harm poor Christian countries. From the point of view of tourism, there will be more interest in rich countries.

As churches, we say you [Israel] don't have the right to impose these quotas because this is a universal church life. You cannot interfere and tell only rich people to come. We are for the rich and the poor. Both can be good believers.

Pope John Paul II announced plans to visit Jerusalem for the second jubilee celebrations. Some Arab countries expressed fears that this will uphold Israel's claim to the city because the pope will be invited by the state of Israel.

Whenever the holy father visits a country, he has to be invited first by the local church. This invitation is seconded by that of the state. As a local church, we have invited him to come in the year 2000. When he comes, he will, of course, face the problems we are facing.

We hope he will say the right word to everyone, Israelis and the Palestinians. Perhaps his word will help. I know that his visit might be interpreted as a silent recognition of the annexation of the city. But to those who believe so, this is not a recognition, it is a pilgrimage... you cannot prevent the Holy See from making his pilgrimage.

But Pope Shenouda III of Egypt has banned Copts from visiting Jerusalem for fear that this would be considered a recognition of Israel's claim to the city. What is your evaluation of this stand?

We have good ties with Pope Shenouda and we meet regularly. We know his position and we talk about Jerusalem. But he has his own vision on the issue of allowing pilgrims to visit Jerusalem. We agree that there is a political question over Jerusalem. But, on the religious level, we say 'no'.

For myself, I cannot prevent simple believers from coming here to pray. So, I can't tell them not to come because there is a political question.

The Coptic church has another problem, which is very Coptic, that of El-Sultan Monastery (handed over by Israel to the Ethiopian church). Perhaps that is another aspect which should be added as a reason behind Pope Shenouda's decision.

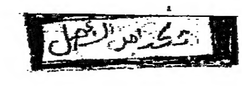
I respect his decision, but I do not share it.

Finally what is your estimate of the current state of the peace process?

I think peace is dead now. But with that we say there is no way out of this situation without the peace process. The party responsible for the death of this process is the present Netanyahu government. However, what gives us hope that this process could be revived is that the majority of Israelis support a just peace. This means that they support the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The state is the best solution to calm Israel's security fears. Once Palestinians have their state, they will grow stronger or weaker within their own boundaries. They will no longer react within Israel's border.

Israel cannot hope to have peace without giving Palestinians all their freedom, including their right to have a state. Even Hamas and others will, when they have a state, stop their resistance against Israel.



هكذا من الأصل

One event, two signs

On the one hand, "calamity"; on the other, "liberation". How can two contradictory narratives be reconciled in a common destiny? Hassan Khidr investigates the semiotic sleights-of-hand which serve to obscure the historic responsibilities — and to obstruct the creation of a future



Years of dispossession

Language is a mode of communication between a transmitter and a receiver. It is also a vehicle for thought, fantasy and dreams. The reality we attempt to describe is not immune to the emotional and political dynamics we project on it. Rather, in our linguistic representations of reality, we transform language into a system for encoding, at both the individual and collective levels. As the purpose of communication develops and as the features of reality increase in complexity and grow ever more intricately intertwined with present interests and their historical and social ramifications, the more convoluted become the masks that we affix upon reality and the more difficult becomes the task of freeing it from attempts to alter or obliterate it.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the linguistic signs that dominate Palestinian and Israeli discourse about the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. This comparison is not intended to place the two conflicting narratives on an equal footing, but rather to analyse their respective representations of an event that occurred at a specific time and place and to shed light on the implications of the elimination of a specific signification or the selection of another signification for an historical event.

The Palestinians have encapsulated their defeat in the War of 1948, their loss of large portions of their country, the transformation of the great majority of them into refugees and the collapse of their political, geographical and social entity in the word *nakba* (calamity). *Lisan Al-Arab* dictionary lists numerous synonyms for the word *nakba*, among which are: *hadath* (misfortune), *naa'iba* (vicissitude), *nawba* (evil turn of fate), *raziya* (heavy loss), *tama* (cataclysmic disaster), *ghaashiya* (oppressive misery), *jaa'iha* (devastation), *mulimma* (tribulation), *tariqa* (sudden affliction), *haaqa* (infliction). It defines *nakbaa'*, which derives from the same triliteral root, as "any of the four winds that shifts madly, wreaking havoc among the winds, so as to engulf the land and wreak great devastation."

The connotative significance of all these synonyms taken together is, firstly, a deference to nature, with all its latent violence and its impetuosity; secondly, a resignation to the vicissitudes of fate; and thirdly, a relinquishment of responsibility for the catastrophe. Thus the long struggle of the Palestinians against the Jewish settlement movement, a struggle punctuated by violent confrontations and dire predictions for the future, and which led to the formation of political parties and organisations, is supressed. Instead we have a discourse of surprise and arbitrary fate, obscuring a gradual decay in forces and the patient assemblage of the elements necessary for defeat.

In this conflict between an immigrant settler minority and an indigenous majority, which eventually led to that majority's defeat and expulsion, was there anything to suggest an oncoming catastrophe? Or should we rather be thinking in terms of an historic responsibility, in the light of which the entire Palestinian entity (before 1948), with all its social, political, cultural and economic institutions, might be held accountable to revision and criticism?

The sign, *nakba*, represents an attempt to focus on the human drama entailed by the event and to transform it into a key for discourse. This attempt was nurtured by two phenomena: the absence of a critical Palestinian self-analysis and the birth of a body of literature heavily imbued with a longing for a lost paradise. This literature is inhabited by refugees whose tents are tattered by the winds, whose hearts burn for revenge, and who suffer the degradation of having to live off foreign relief assistance as they await the day of salvation.

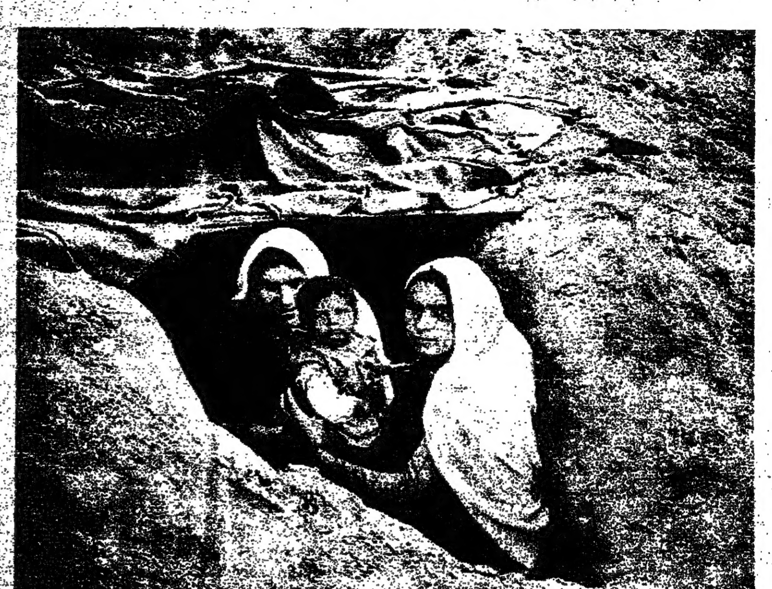
This was the context that gave birth to the Palestinian refugee who inhabits a text called "Palestine". In reality, Palestine was never a paradise; nor was it lost. It was a remote part of the Ottoman Empire, inhabited by poor peasant-farmers. The West Bank and Gaza, which were in and of Palestine, contained the seeds of a Palestinian life that might have survived the annihilation of the larger entity.

However, for the idea of *nakba* to be complete, the idea of this larger entity had to be repressed: Consequently, 'refugee' became a synonym for Palestinian identity, which in turn meant ignoring the existence of the approximately 180,000 Palestinians who remained in that portion of Palestine that was lost. Their continued presence in their country was not viewed as proof of the impossibility of uprooting a people from their land, or as proof of their attachment to their land. Rather it was viewed as cause for embarrassment, due to the certain contamination engendered by their daily contact with the usurpers. Although the land was the object of the conflict between the Jewish minority and the Palestinian majority, it was not to be found in the texts alongside the literary refugee. Nor was it to be found in Palestine, which became a mental object incapable of exhausting the significations of paradise. The irony is that the representation of the Palestinian identity which became popular in the seventies, that of the freedom fighter, and which revived the land and glorified it, was created by people who had grown up and thrived in Galilee, not in the refugee tents (men like Emil Habibi, Mahmoud Darwish, Samih Qasem, and others).

If the original use of *nakba* conformed to the circumstances and suffering of a society consisting largely of peasant farmers, the conversion of this sign into hard political currency was far from innocent or spontaneous. Following the 1948 defeat, the Palestinian question became an Arab question. The remainder of Palestine had fallen under the administration of two Arab countries (Egypt and Jordan), large numbers of Palestinian refugees had fled to these and other Arab countries, and the defeat of the Arab armies had left a widespread and deeply-felt rancour. The Palestine issue was thus absorbed into the evolution of the social elite of the Arab world, particularly in those countries bordering on Palestine where the blame for defeat was laid at the door of defective weapons and treachery. At the Arab level, therefore, the signification of *nakba* was reinforced. It became an essential part of the mechanisms for mobilising opinion within the context of various domestic power struggles. Faulty weapons and treachery were catchwords which played a part in bringing down certain existing regimes. This process in turn required that the question of Palestinian accountability be shunted aside and reduced to a technicality that could be resolved by appeal to non-defective weapons and patriotic rulers. For their part, the Palestinians took on board whole episodes of the Arab narrative and merged them with their own, as new evidence of their commitment to their national-Arab identity.

It is only possible to understand the sudden radicalism that broke into the discourse of the Palestinians following the Arab defeat in June 1967 as a backlash against the Arab narrative, which had in many ways denied the Palestinians' existence at an ontological level. It is only possible to understand the Palestinians' insistence on political autonomy, their assault on the idea of the refugee, their elevation of the refugee camp from a place of misery and degradation to a production plant for freedom fighters and the birth of the idea of the state at the expense of the idea of paradise as a retaliation against the two intervening decades between 1948 and 1967 and as a reproach addressed directly to their social and political leaders.

If, for the Palestinians, the sign *nakba* referred ultimately to the vicissitudes of 'nature', for the Zionists it was 'history' that provided the material out of which they would model two different designations for the event of 1948: "independence" and "liberation". It is impossible to understand these two terms as names for the victory of a minority of immigrant settlers over an indigenous majority population outside of the context of Zionist discourse itself. This discourse is suffused with the idea of normalising Jewish life, of transforming the Jews from a religious group outside history into a national group that acts on history and is acted upon by history in the same manner as other national groups.



Driven back into the earth: A 1949 AP photo with the caption "Some 216,000 of the poorest of the estimated million Arab refugees are living now in Gaza"



Fresh off the train of modernity: The Zionist Commission arriving in Palestine, 1918

"If, for the Palestinians, the sign nakba referred ultimately to the vicissitudes of 'nature', for the Zionists it was 'history' that provided the material out of which they would model two different designations for the event of 1948: 'independence' and 'liberation'"

"Independence" in this context has three separate significations. Firstly, it identifies the Zionist movement with the other national liberation movements that sprang up in the wake of World War II. Secondly, it locates the Jewish drive to settle Palestine as an historical event — the last and most recent manifestation of the purported Jewish continuity in this land from the collapse of the Jewish entity in AD70 until the first half of the 20th century. Thirdly, it redescribes the search for statehood that had been advocated by a handful of Jews from Eastern Europe as a vanguard movement whose political enterprise rests on the ontology of a people as a pre-existing nation (albeit a nation without a land).

For this sign to be complete, certain facts that might undermine the possibility of normalising Jewish life would have to be excluded. Political thought generally presupposes the existence of a people as a precondition for the existence of a nationalist movement. In Zionism the equation is inverted: the existence of a national movement became proof of the existence of a people. Normally a nation of people projects itself onto the land it inhabits. Zionism needed the land in order to project itself onto the people.

Even given this conceptual inversion, the Zionists were still not able to stretch the sign ('independence') to its furthest and most absurd limits: that is, to signify the liberation of Palestine from the Palestinians and the realisation of Israeli independence through the overthrow of Palestinian occupation of the land. The Zionist classics, including Hertzl's *The Jewish State*, speak of the "Jewish settlement fund in Palestine" and the possibility of buying the land from the Ottoman authorities or obtaining the land under international guarantees. Never before in history has a national liberation movement had to buy its own nation. Nor could a demographic minority that had been living on the land for only a matter of decades and that controlled less than seven per cent of that land possess sufficient historical or nationalist justification to dare comport itself as a national liberation movement in this sense.

Consequently, Zionist discourse suppressed its conflict with the Palestinians and transformed the Palestinian uprisings into disturbances instigated by armed Arab groups. It excluded the Palestinians from the *dynamic of colonialism and liberation* and accorded this significance only to the British. Thus, three decades of the British mandate in Palestine became the "colonial era", and the operations mounted by the Zionist gangs against the British forces became the primary expression of the Jewish war of liberation and independence in Palestine. The fact that the British were the fathers of the Balfour Declaration and the original guarantors of the Jewish settler movement in Palestine was conveniently forgotten.

The Zionist narrative thus transformed its conflict with the Palestinians into a quirk of fate: two rival nationalist movements had emerged in the same place at the same time, leading inevitably to misunderstanding *and an inability to find the* means to cooperate against the British occupiers.

As for the expulsion of the majority of the indigenous population, it was the tragic result of the Arab military intervention, which had been intended to dislodge the nascent Jewish "independent" entity. The subsequent and quite objective existence of refugees became, in turn, a political device, invented by Arab states for the purposes of perpetual agitation against Israel.

In spite of its inherent contradictions and its betrayal of history, the notion of "independence" is still a central sign in Israeli narrative and discourse. Nevertheless, in the work of the new generation of [Israeli] historians and social scientists, it is possible to come across new developments, the results of which are difficult to predict, but which suggest that the official narrative has exhausted many of its ideological defences and sustaining fallacies. These developments have revolved around two points: the investigation into the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, and the re-examination of the Zionist movement's failure to address the existence of the Palestinians until 1948. These inquiries have yielded a recognition of the centrality of the Zionist conflict, not with the British, but with the Palestinians, *in conjunction with a realisation that the* Zionist leaders cannot be exonerated of their responsibility for the expulsion of the Palestinians and for ignoring their nationalist ambitions at the time of the British protectorate. Even if these new developments are only directly known in a few narrow academic circles, their importance cannot be underestimated, as they intersect with the anxieties and questions that have emerged in the works of a number of Israeli novelists and poets over the past three decades.

The process of linguistic codification is intertwined with a range of other cultural elements, among which are the relationship of a specific culture to itself, the extent of its capacity for self-*criticism and the relative importance of a specific* linguistic sign at a specific time and place for the cultural group in question. However, the sign is not immutable. It is perpetually mutating, which explains the constant change in beliefs in various societies.

While *nakba* may have served to hide what the Palestinians were incapable of doing or expressing five decades ago, their present circumstances are very different. The current minority-majority conflict in Palestine is in need of a revision of its signs. Specifically the problem calls for a restoration of the former demographic superiority. The lost Palestine will never return. As for the real Palestine, it exists in the Palestine of today with its particular demographic, cultural and linguistic characteristics, and most notably with its modest majority of Jews and its Palestinian minority that stands to become a demographic majority within a few decades.

What occurred five decades ago, apart from the human drama, was that Palestinian sovereignty over the land was violently wrested away and supplanted by a model of exclusive Jewish statehood. The displaced Palestinians did not counter with a model of statehood of their own until the latter half of the seventies. Even then they were incapable of elevating that model from the status of a political slogan to a sign of significance in their own narrative of events and, sadly, it was forgotten in the onrush of subsequent political developments.

The Palestinians *still face the task of deriving a* model of statehood capable of solving the Palestinian-Jewish question. Today, this task appears more urgent than ever. This year the Palestinians have been commemorating the passage of fifty years since they lost their country. If the aim of this attention is to incite the collective memory to defend the land of its identity by invoking the names of more Palestinian villages that were eradicated and the human suffering that this engendered, then we must conclude that the war which juxtaposed *the Palestinian memory with that of the Zionist co*loniser still dominates the Palestinian mindset as we stand at the threshold to the next fifty years. The rationale which would recreate the search for the lost Paradise may have its advantages, but only if we distance ourselves from the memories of bitterness and grief engendered by reality in the past, and which alienate us even further from the reality of today.

The backlash against the sign *nakba* is proof that the Palestinian narrative has reached the age of maturity. Every account of "what happened" is implicit with proposals of "what should be". The way in which we narrate our stories is determined by the end we want to hear. The conflict between two stories — between the Palestinian and Israeli narratives — is both the essence of and the key to this conflict. I do not believe that the rifts that have emerged in the Israeli narrative of the event should remain a purely Israeli concern. On the contrary, we should make these rifts into one of our most important priorities. The more we can contribute to expanding those rifts and to determining what potential they offer, the closer we will come to understanding the end that we seek.

We who are alive today and who have experienced the war between Palestinian memory and the Zionist colonisers will not live to see the end of the next fifty years. However, we can start to think about what it should be like and to sow the seeds whose fruit our children will reap half a century from now. Palestine will always be where it is. The problem will be how to judge those who have not understood the lessons of the past and so remain mired in the repetition of its mistakes.

Hassan Khidr is the recipient of this year's Palestine Award for best newspaper columnist. He is also an expert on Israeli literature. He has published a study on the subject of "Hawiyyat Al-Akhar" (1996, Itihad El-Kuttab publications), and translated a novel by David Grossman.

We welcome letters and contributions on *all* subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6069; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Dangerously silly, but true

The recent electoral victory of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has profound implications not only for relations with Pakistan, but for the balance of power in the South Asian region as a whole. Eqbal Ahmad, writing from Islamabad, asks some hard questions

In an early gesture, Atal Behari Vajpayee underlined the importance he attaches to India's relations with Pakistan when immediately after being sworn in as prime minister he turned up at the India-Pakistan hockey match, greeted the players, and watched the game just long enough — eight minutes — to see his team score a goal. That's quintessential Vajpayee. He likes to be friendly and gracious — and he loves to win.

He leads a shaky coalition of 19 parties and an obese team of 42 ministers to which he anticipates additions. A cat with 19 tails may not survive very long. If it does, it will not run efficiently.

Vajpayee has been wise and bold, nevertheless, in assigning jobs. For the finance portfolio, he bypassed Murli Manohar Joshi, an economic nationalist and a ranking leader in his own Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) who is highly favoured by the BJP's ancestor-organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in favour of Yashwant Sinha, a relative newcomer to the party and an economic liberal, a clear signal of moderation addressed to capital, both domestic and foreign. As home minister, BJP president L K Advani has the responsibility of keeping order which will be quite a challenge for one given to creating disturbances of the peace. As defence minister, the irrepressible George Fernandes is likely to make media-waves and follow the brass the best he can. The prime minister has kept the foreign affairs portfolio to himself, which is an indication of his interest and also of the importance he attaches to India's foreign relations.

If Vajpayee's government lasts even half its legal tenure, its domestic impact is likely to be largely ideological, while its leader devotes his attention to international diplomacy. At a conference in Sri Lanka last week several Indian scholars, including Ashish Nandy who is among India's most original thinkers, emphasised the BJP's evolution toward moderation and secularism, and also its dependence on allies whose agendas can only dilute its own. They were convincing up to a point: in so far as hard policies are concerned, the BJP government is likely to yield at best continuity rather than change. "They will make symbolic changes," agrees Ashish Nandy.

The impact can be harmful, nevertheless. Symbolic gestures and events invariably have substantive consequences for the lives of nations and peoples. Often the effects of concrete events and policies are more easily reversed by antidotal action than is the legacy of symbolic influences. Symbols shape culture, outlook, attitudes and identities. Pakistanis who have lived through the hollow opportunism of Z A Bhutto's populist posturing and Mohammad Ziaul Haq's Islamisation process will recognise the truth of this observation. The one was as serious about the people's interests as the other was about Islam. Each in his own way was a 'moderate', wedded to opportunity rather than to principle.

Yet, the afterlife of their symbolic engagements continues to distort Pakistani political and cultural life. As a party, the BJP runs the double jeopardy of carrying both the populist and the sectarian germs. Unable to deliver an effective and purposeful government, it is likely to compensate for its failures with grand gestures toward its rhetorical promise of 'one nation and one culture'. As Rabindranath Tagore feared seven decades ago, symbolic gesticulation of this sort could have a devastating effect on this multi-caste, multi-cultural and multi-religious country.



Protesters burn the effigy of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee *(photo: AFP)*

A sense of anxiety prevails among India's neighbours, especially in Pakistan. Their concern has been augmented by the BJP leaders' statements that they might formally introduce nuclear weapons into India's military arsenal. There are ambiguities in those statements, and there is no certainty as to what they actually intend. India's neighbours — none of whom wish to live in the shadow of the bomb — should nevertheless take this threat seriously and make, as vigorously and quietly as possible, whatever efforts they can to dissuade Delhi from so dangerous a course. There are greater risks in this situation for Pakistan than for any other country, as it alone has unresolved disputes with India. Moreover, Pakistan's security environment will be affected by the activation of the Prithvi and Agni missile programmes, and it alone will have to weigh its nuclear options. In fact, the political pressure on its government to match India may overwhelm all rational calculation.

The need to put pressure on India not to commit itself to a nuclear arsenal is urgent. But if it is to be effective it should be quiet and systematic. Recent statements by Pakistani officials once again underline their proclivity to disregard the relationship between sound and effect, and to ignore the distinctions between diplomacy and propaganda. The great powers need to show a sense of concern and resolve which are best conveyed by firm pressures and tactical silence. Bluster and threats suggest panic and pugnacity. A momentous is sue is then reduced to a South Asian squabble.

Without underestimating its importance to South Asian security, one ought also to understand that Pakistan is not the prime "target" at issue in the BJP's quest for nuclear power.

In fact, the BJP leaders are among the few people in India who are genuinely content with India's 1947 partition. Authentic communalists, they are happy to be rid of no less than 250 million Muslims, now divided between Pakistan and Bangladesh. In retrospect India's partition was an RSS dream come true, and they would not want to undo it. As for India's desire for hegemony, it is well-known that hegemony is not achieved by possessing the nuclear or any other bomb. BJP leaders wish to declare their nuclear weapons because they view it as a passport to the 'great powers club', and they are obsessed with the formal entrance conditions. Dangerously silly, but true.

There are few domestic constraints to hold them back. In India as in Pakistan public opinion is not opposed to nuclear weapons. Differences exist within the establishment only as to the degree of ambiguity that should accompany their possession, differences which governments have easy ways of resolving. Moreover, the BJP is likely to remain a shaky coalition, and hence unlikely to deliver desperately needed bread and butter to the people. Governments which do not deliver seek refuge in patriotic fervour. Hence the need to neutralise the BJP's inner contradictions through external stimuli. This is better achieved by quiet diplomacy than public warnings and confrontations.

Over the years Vajpayee has taken a keen interest in Pakistan. He believes that normal and stable relations between the two countries are essential for India to become a successful player in international politics. "The great powers exploit our differences," he said to me many years ago. As foreign minister, his enthusiastic efforts to improve relations surprised Pakistani officials. He is likely again to make vigorous gestures to improve trade and cultural exchange. Yet he is not likely to negotiate Kashmir on Pakistani or even Kashmiri terms. Lacking the necessary numbers in parliament, his government cannot repeal Article 370 of the Indian Constitution even if it wants to. But it can harden its military posture in Kashmir, and escalate the ongoing covert warfare with Pakistan. Given the current composition of the Pakistani establishment, its response may be symmetrical. Indo-Pakistan relations would become then highly susceptible to miscalculations. In Islamabad, as in Delhi, it is time to let analysis prevail over instinct.

Pakistan should weigh its alternatives in case India does explicitly claim nuclear capacity. A number of questions arise: What strategic or political benefits accrue from renouncing Pakistan's posture of ambiguity? How can open — as against understood/assumed — possession of nuclear weapons enhance its security? Will the pressure of the great powers on Pakistan be comparable to their pressure on India? Are we willing to bear those pressures? What kind of arms race would inevitably follow as a result of two-way weaponisation? Is Pakistan in a position to enter such an arms race against India? What, if any, are the strategic, political, and economic advantages in maintaining the present posture of ambiguity? These are serious questions requiring research, analysis and debate. There is a taboo of sorts surrounding this subject. Officials could do citizens the favour of initiating this much-needed discussion.

There is a crying need also to review Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Realities on the ground have changed. I have argued this case repeatedly and at length. Quotations from General Sunderjee and citations of Indian human rights violations cannot change those realities. If the national interest is to be served, they have to be confronted.

But nothing is more central right now to Pakistan's security than peace in Afghanistan and improvement of relations with Iran. They are neighbours with extensive borders with Pakistan, and share with us affinities of culture, history and faith. Since Pakistan's founding, Iran has been a loyal friend, and a source of security because our interests were complementary. Harmony is our geopolitical imperative. In recent years our policy or the perception of our policy, particularly as it concerns Afghanistan, has soured relations between us. These must be restored to their natural, collaborative state. Nowhere is it more vital to begin this process than with Afghanistan.

Not long ago Pakistani officials used to claim kudos for bleeding the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Soviets departed. The Americans left too, having cashed in their investments. A decade later, Afghanistan's Mujahideen continue to make mincemeat of the country and its hapless people. Our officials deny responsibility with impressive ingenuity and zero effect. Two facts about this ugly civil war are incontrovertible. Pakistan is the dominant power in relation to Afghanistan: the strongest, most retrograde, and most anti-Shi'a warring faction enjoys its support. Iran, along with Uzbekistan and Russia, is aiding the Taliban's factious opponents. Thus external factors have become organically linked to Afghanistan's warrior culture, and its economy of drugs, guns and smuggling. If peace is the goal, those links must be broken. There is no point in apportioning guilt. The problem and the opportunities to solve it can be identified.

Afghanistan has lost its centre. The people that were known in traditional Muslim societies as *ahl al-hall wal aqd* (decision-makers) have vanished from it. There are no peacemakers left in Afghanistan. That possibility can only come from outside. Responsibility rests with Pakistan and Iran, with the United Nations serving as a facilitator. Only when a peace process starts in earnest can one persuade the United States, the European powers and Japan to provide the incentives of a meaningful aid package for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, a highly respected Algerian diplomat, has lately been in Islamabad seeking peace for Afghanistan on the UN's behalf. The time to begin the high game of peace is now. May one hope that Prime Minister Vajpayee will have the pleasure of watching Pakistan score this time?

Another round for the Tsar

The Russian president sacked his whole cabinet last week, and it seems he hopes to do the same to the parliament. Abdel-Malek Khalil writes from Moscow

Emerging buoyed and invigorated after a one-week eclipse in a five-star Moscow clinic to treat his latest bout of ill-health, Russian President Boris Yeltsin seemed ready and able to go on the political warpath once again. Yeltsin dropped a political bombshell last Monday by announcing the dismissal of his entire cabinet, including his loyal and long-serving Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. After having sacked his own political cronies without facing any major outcry, Yeltsin asked 35-year-old political novice, Sergei Kiriyenko, to form a new cabinet.

A former banker and oil company executive with only seven months' experience in government as energy and fuel minister, Kiriyenko seems to be the most likely candidate to succeed Chernomyrdin as prime minister. "Kiriyenko is a new man in the corridors of power," announced Yeltsin to reporters as he ushered the young man into Chernomyrdin's office, pointed to the presidential portrait on the wall and warned Kiriyenko to keep it hanging until the year 2000.

In a reference to the catastrophic decline of the country's economy since deregulation and economic liberalisation took off under his administration, Yeltsin blamed his former cabinet for "lacking dynamism and initiative, new outlooks, fresh approaches and ideas."

Youthful, dynamic and brimming over with fresh initiatives, Kiriyenko could usher in a new era of economic recovery. Despite Yeltsin's loaded rhetoric, Kiriyenko's innovative approach has not yet been divulged.

Relatively unknown, even to political insiders like Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, Kiriyenko's sudden and unexpected selection for the top cabinet post remains shrouded in mystery. After meeting with the Prime Minister-Nominee, Zyuganov was noncommittal — saying that he could not "make any immediate conclusions because [Kiriyenko] does not have full information, does not know the real situation in any field except the one he was dealing with."

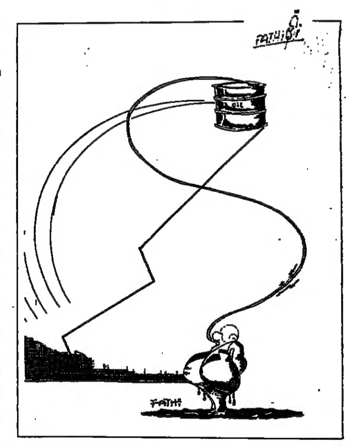
Gennady Seleznyov, speaker of the Duma — the lower house of parliament — appeared even less impressed with Kiriyenko, declaring in no uncertain terms that the former energy and fuel minister did not qualify for the premiership. "He lacks economic experience that would enable him to be in charge of the huge Russian economy."

Notwithstanding Yeltsin's flowery public rhetoric, Kiriyenko himself seemed to concur with Seleznyov's assessment. In an interview with the Russian daily *Izvestia*, Kiriyenko admitted he felt overwhelmed by the turn of events. "I'm frightened, very frightened. It's impossible to be a professional in every field. The essential thing is to understand clearly where your competence ends and rely on members of your team for the rest."

Despite Kiriyenko's evident lack of qualifications to assume the second most important post in the Russian government, the Clinton administration was quick to back Yeltsin's bizarre choice of a premier saying that he had the "reformist credentials" to do the job. "Kiriyenko seems to be a dynamic gentleman. He has a reputation as a vigorous supporter of the general policies of economic reform supported by President Yeltsin," said US State Department deputy spokesman James Foley.

Intent on pushing his protégé to form a new cabinet as quickly as possible and get on with the job of his ill-fated economic reform programme, which has brought the country to the brink of economic disaster, Yeltsin issued a stern warning to parliament to approve his prime minister-designate or face the consequences — under the 1993 constitution, the president can dissolve parliament and call for early elections in case the latter rejects his choice of premier three times in a row. "Do not bring about a new cycle of confrontation," Yeltsin told the parliament in televised remarks. "I will not let anyone get away with it. It is useless even trying."

Empowered to impose the premier and cabinet of his choice on the Russian parliament, Yeltsin is sure to win all rounds in this uneven battle. Some political analysts even believe that Yeltsin's real aim in sacking his cabinet and choosing an unqualified premier-elect was to engineer a political upheaval that would, in the end, justify his dissolution of a recalcitrant Communist-dominated *Duma*. Should this scenario come to pass, Yeltsin would be in the position to call for new elections and let a pliant and compliant Kiriyenko pursue reforms with youthful dynamism and vigour.



Colonising Bill

The US president made noises about understanding Africa's concerns but the most au fait on the continent were not impressed, writes Gamal Nkrumah

Yes, US President Bill Clinton's proposals for putting Africa on the world map include a few nuggets. Last year, African nations collectively received $700 million in American aid.

The economic centrepiece of Clinton's African tour was his announcement in Johannesburg that the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, set up to underwrite risky loans to Third World countries, is to launch three special funds totalling $650 million — mostly in guarantees to American firms doing business in Africa. But Clinton's pledge to write off bilateral debts in Africa's weakest economies could hardly be regarded as groundbreaking.

Clinton's Growth and Opportunity Bill, now before the US Senate, is widely seen as a barely veiled American attempt to colonise Africa. Many Africans have dubbed it neo-colonial. "That the provisions of this bill will restrict our freedom to trade with other countries is something we find totally unacceptable," South African President Nelson Mandela lashed out in an angry, no-nonsense tone, on a televised CNN interview.

Without casting aspersions on Clinton's credibility as a kindly benefactor, the American president's gesture is, simply put, no big deal. "We in the West are intimately involved in Africa, not just historically; we have the moral responsibility to find ways of reducing substantially the crushing burden of debt which compromises the economies of entire nations and sends millions of Africans to early graves," Britain's archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Anglican Church which has a following of some 70 million in Africa, explained during his own African tour a couple of months ago. The Pope, too, has long campaigned for the underwriting of the continent's crippling debt burden. The pontiff has an even bigger African following of some 200 million.

Clinton, as well, has a following of sorts. His visit made giants out of one or two political upstarts, and they shall no doubt remain eternally grateful for a widely publicised presidential handshake.

But Clinton also met some of Africa's most influential men. Many had in the past accumulated great wealth and power without any accountability, but Clinton met with the chosen few. Last Wednesday, he attended an East African summit where he met veteran African political guru, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, and Nyerere's compatriot, the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Salim Ahmed Salim.

Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi and Congolese President Laurent Désiré Kabila are in America's bad books, but they were considered too important to be left out. Nodding like old men in the sun, they made all the right noises, then politely changed the subject when the touchy issue of the necessity to harmonise positions on security questions arose.

The Washington-initiated African Crisis Response Initiative, with $35 million allocated by the US Congress, is a controversial security arrangement that unnerves many African leaders. Sceptics have been battered into submission. The Great Lakes region remains a tinderbox. "But from Cape Town to Kampala, from Dar-es-Salam to Dakar, democracy is gaining strength, business is growing, peace is making progress," Clinton assured Africa's leaders.

It was Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the host of the east African summit, who stole the show with his championing of unconventional causes such as pan-Africanism and no-party democracy. Museveni's nonconformist views on democracy and good governance held sway. Clinton gave a nod of approval.

Many saw Clinton's visit to Kampala as consecrating Museveni as the regional kingpin. Museveni overran Kampala in 1986 after a five-year war in which over half a million Ugandans perished. Ugandans recently gave Museveni 72.5 per cent of the vote in "no-party elections." Everyone, Clinton included, heaped praise on Museveni.

Clinton's lightning visit to war-torn Rwanda was an eloquent apology for the tragic lessons of the 1994 Tutsi holocaust where 500,000 people perished in a most appalling manner "because of the world's indifference," Clinton confessed.

In Washington, there is much confusion, or at least no consensus, as what to do with Nigeria's military ruler Gen. Sani Abacha who is due to stand — and most probably win — in presidential elections scheduled for October 1998. In South Africa, Clinton announced that he is willing to accept Abacha as Nigeria's president if he won the forthcoming October elections. Two weeks earlier Susan Rice, Clinton's chief Africa aide and assistant secretary of state for African affairs, warned that Washington would never accept Abacha as Nigeria's president even under a civilian guise. Presidential National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, who accompanied Clinton on his African tour, told reporters in South Africa that there was no contradiction or change of policy on Nigeria. Berger went on to explain that if Abacha released political prisoners and held free and fair elections, Washington would accept him as Nigeria's civilian ruler.

It wouldn't be the first time that Washington publicly embraces a military-turned-civilian ruler. Clinton's embrace of Ghana's President Jerry Rawlings was testament to how agreeable military rulers who have had a change of heart and turn civilian become — no matter how abominable their human rights record once was. The White House asked Congress to put $26 million aside for the "Education for Good Government" programme.

Conventional wisdom does not foresee a full African economic recovery which does not include America. Americans are the money masters. "If the end of his trip is the end of his interest in Africa, and there are no real policies that flow from it, then it is not going to be significant for either African-Americans or Africa," commented Cherri Waters, vice president of Inter-Action, an African-American coalition group of over 160 non-profit development organisations.

But there are doubts that America's interest in Africa is skin-deep. France is still the biggest investor in Africa, even though that might change once and for all after the Clinton visit. The US and France account for half of investment in Africa. The continent is a market the US can no longer afford to ignore. Clinton's African tour will undoubtedly raise Africa's investor profile.

The next African visit by an American president will probably take place sometime towards the end of the first decade of the next century. By then, there will be countries on whose political fortunes the entire continent's future depends. There will be Nigeria, probably free of military dictatorship, still by far Africa's most populous nation and perhaps potentially the richest both culturally and economically on the continent; Ethiopia, with a capital where the OAU is located, may increase to 80 million people from its present 60 million; Congo, which may no longer be Kabila's Congo then, could be the continent's most strategically situated resource-rich country with a population twice as big as California's and straddling a river basin which holds 50 per cent of Africa's fresh water reservoir.

The next time an American president visits Africa, the late pan-African leader Kwame Nkrumah's vision of a United States of Africa will not be such a far-off dream as it seems today. More African leaders will understand the importance of Museveni's maxim: Pan-Africanism is synergistic.

Tight budget, generous plan

The Shura Council this week approved the new state budget and development plan for the fiscal year 1998-1999. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The Shura Council launched this week's annual debate on the government's budget and plan for the coming fiscal year 1998-1999, which will begin on 1 July. So as to *maintain a tight* spending policy as part of the economic reform programme, spending has been capped at LE91.2 billion, LE7.7 billion or 9.2 per cent higher than the previous year. The gross budget deficit will be as low as LE800 million or 1 per cent of the GDP.

Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib, addressing the Council last Saturday, indicated that the new budget is governed by a whole shopping list of objectives. Topping this list, he added, is the creation of a more favourable environment for investment and trade. "In this new budget, we want to tell investors and businessmen that fiscal policies in Egypt are now quite transparent. They are primarily aimed at improving the general climate of investment and *giving the private* sector a greater role in the national economy. Besides, the reports of the international lending institutions have heaped praise upon the successful economic policies of the Egyptian government. For example, the government has been able, in line with its agreement with the IMF, to keep the budget deficit to a very low level for the third year running," El-Gharib said.

Next on the list of the new budget's objectives, El-Gharib said, are raising the real economic growth rate to 6.2 per cent of GDP and increasing public spending on social services. According *to El-Gharib*, the *new budget* allocates LE43.5 billion to social services, compared to LE31.7 billion last year, an increase of 8.8 per cent. As a result, the social dimension accounts for 38 per cent of total spending under the new budget. "Our objective is to achieve higher investment rates, but not at the expense of allocating greater amounts to social services at the same time. We want the rich to achieve higher profits because this will be reflected in more labour-intensive projects. We want the poor to cooperate and accept that there are rich people whose projects bring both greater profits for themselves and more employment for others," El-Gharib argued.

El-Gharib also revealed that the government has allocated LE24.4 billion for servicing domestic and foreign debts. "The servicing of foreign debts this year requires LE4.4 billion, while the servicing of domestic debts will require as *much as LE20 billion. The rise in domestic debt* does not bode ill for the national economy, since it is primarily due to the government's current efforts to reschedule debts of public sector companies to banks. Right now, we are setting aside half of the privatisation proceeds in order to pay off these debts and as privatisation progresses we will be able to settle an even larger part of these debts. Anyhow, domestic debts still account for a mere 4.8 per cent of GDP and will *drop to 2.8 per cent next year," said El-Gharib.*

Elaborating on the state's major source of revenues, El-Gharib deplored the level of tax and custom evasion in the country, which is still among the highest in the world. "It is really sad to say that only 10 per cent of those taxpayers who are required to submit their annual financial statements to the Tax Authority this month do so," El-Gharib said. However, he predicted that state revenues are nevertheless expected to rise by 10 per cent in the new fiscal year to LE55 billion, primarily through taxes and custom duties.

Minister of State for Planning Zafer El-Bishri, also addressing the Council last Saturday, stated that the 1998-99 socio-economic development plan has set a target for GDP to reach LE268.7 billion, an increase of 6.2 per cent over last year's LE253.1 billion. Seventy-one per cent of this amount, he added, will be accounted for by *the private sector. El-Bishri explained that the* new plan had been prepared at a time when the international economic community has been witnessing severe financial crisis in Southeast Asia and at the same time unprecedented economic growth in the United States of America. "Although the Southeast Asian meltdown hit many countries hard, it had very little negative effect on the Egyptian economy. We have been able to achieve a number of very successful monetary *and fiscal reforms, renovate our infrastructure* and upgrade a large part of our productive assets. Over the last 16 years, we have invested *LE447 billion in reviving our economy*. This amount is unprecedented in the history of Egypt in the 20th century. Out of this amount, LE216 billion was allocated to renovating infrastructure, LE191 billion to building productive capacity and LE40 billion to the service sector," El-Bishri said. He added that the value of investments under the new plan is projected at LE65.8 billion, 56 per cent of which is to come from the private sector. Domestic savings will finance 95.3 per cent of these total investments.

According to El-Bishri, industry comes top of the sectors receiving investments with 45.3 per cent (LE14.7 billion) of the total. "Industry is now the most important sector with the highest value added to the Egyptian economy. The contribution of this sector to GDP increased from *12.9 per cent in 1981-82 to 18.5 per cent this* year and is expected to reach 19.2 per cent next year. Besides, he added, the contribution of the industrial private sector to GDP reached LE37.1 billion this year and is expected to reach LE42.2 billion next year, while the contribution of the public sector is expected to drop from LE9.7 billion to LE9.3 billion due to the privatisation of a larger number of public sector industrial companies. This shows how far we have been able to make *radical* changes in the structure of the Egyptian economy," said El-Bishri. Next on the map of investments, said El-Bishri, is *agriculture, receiving LE7 billion.* "The agricultural sector has registered an unprecedented growth rate of 3.4 per cent per year," El-Bishri asserted. As for other sectors, the minister said that the petroleum sector will receive LE5.5 billion, electricity LE3.1 billion and transport and telecommunications LE7.3 billion. "All in all, these figures show that we have succeeded in balancing a difficult equation, that is, in achieving radical change in our national economy *while preserving fiscal and monetary stability,"* El-Bishri declared.

A number of MPs, however, argued that the statements by the finance and planning ministers painted a very rosy picture of the national economy. Rifaat El-Said, the sole representative of the leftist-oriented Tagammu Party in the Coun*cil, also criticised the government's policy of* opening the door "wide" to all investors of all nationalities. "This means that the Israelis are also being invited to invest in Egypt," El-Said said. "Then I want to ask one question: does Israel open its own doors to investors of all nationalities? Of course not."

Delegation promotes US agricultural exports in Egypt

An American government and banking delegation targets Egypt as a prime market for American agricultural exports. Aziza Sami reports

A delegation from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Cobank, America's largest agricultural bank, praised the investment climate in Egypt. The delegation visited Cairo this week in a drive to reinforce its ongoing export credit guarantee programmes in Egypt — earmarked at $250 million for the current fiscal year.

Mary Chambliss of the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service said the delegation was also considering launching a new programme to fund American exports of capital goods and services.

"Egypt over the years has been a major market," Chambliss told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "We assess the Egyptian economy as dynamic and growing, with a private sector activity that we are supportive of. We are very high on prospects for the Egyptian economy and for our agricultural exports here," Chambliss said. "We have an exposure limit here of $250 million. I consider this a very positive statement for Egypt."

The programme has evolved with the growth of the private sector in Egypt, and US food exports are conducted on a straight commercial basis as opposed to food aid or subsidies.

Two USDA export credit guarantee programmes are currently working in Egypt, known as GSM-102, and *GSM-103, which make commercial financing* available for private sector imports of US food and agricultural products on deferred payment terms.

Under both programmes, the USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) underwrites credit extended by eligible financial institutions in the US, in this case Cobank, to 14 approved Egyptian banks that issue dollar-denominated irrevocable letters of credit in favour of its exporters as a means of payment for imported US agricultural commodities. Chambliss said that the USDA was also considering launching a new programme in Egypt for the funding of capital goods and facilities.

This programme, known as the Facility Guarantee Programme *mandated by the US Congress in its 1996* Farm Bill, is budgeted for $100 million in the current fiscal year and has so far targeted countries in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and Central America.

"The programme operates on a commercial basis in emerging markets, in countries which answer to the risk criteria in macroeconomy, political situation and the banking sector," said Chambliss. "We have come here to get feedback from the people who have used our two previous programmes, as well as address questions on facilities in Egypt for capital goods. There is a potential here for a new programme, but this depends on the proposals we get (from the private and banking sectors)."

Cobank which holds $19 billion in total financial assets, finances US agricultural cooperatives, agricultural production and exports. It's the main funder of GSM programmes in Egypt in addition to any other prospective programmes.

Kevin Becker, senior vice-president of International Banking Group, said that Egyptian banking system was extremely eligible for export credit programmes, "because of its increasing liquidity."

"Egypt has made a lot of progress over the past few years in this respect," Becker *said. "Its banks can access* medium-rate funds that are very attractive, very close to what GSM programmes can provide."

Chambliss nevertheless predicted that with increasing capital flows some parts of the programme might be eliminated in the near future. "With the dynamic growth *of the* Egyptian economy, there may be some sectors where the GSM programmes are no longer useful, where these sectors can procure sufficient liquidity and credit. *There may* be other sectors where financing would still be useful, and this is where we are looking into the area of capital goods," she said.

Although Cobank described the GSM export-credit guarantee programmes as a situation where everybody wins — the importer, the exporter, as well as the banks involved — concerns were raised at a meeting between the USDA delegation and some of the programme's participants. "Egyptian importers using the GSM programme are some prime names who enjoy preferential rates," said Mohamed El-Qadi, from Barclays Bank. "American exporters obviously benefit as well. But for [Egyptian] banks [involved in the programme] there is no profit margin that makes this transaction attractive because of fee and issuance commissions which add up. The question is what is in it for us? If the GSM programme is to promote American exports then it should also encourage local banks here by splitting or sharing the costs."

Less than a warm welcome

Expatriate Egyptian businessmen are *keen to bring their capital and their* expertise back to their native land. But, as Sherine Nasr discovered, they are still more likely to be met by red-tape than a red carpet

"The Egyptian economy is growing, there is no doubt about it. But we still suffer from many restrictions that have to be removed in order to encourage more investment," said Saad Abdel-Baset, an Egyptian expatriate from Germany and chairman of Hansa Food in Ismailia.

Abdel-Baset was reiterating the common attitude shared by more than 500 Egyptian expatriate businessmen who gathered in Cairo for two days to discuss challenges to investment opportunities in the coming mil*lennium.*

"The government is implementing a well-thought-out policy to attract foreign investment to Egypt," said Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri.

Opening the doors for the private sector to carry out gigantic infrastructure projects is part of this policy. "Under the BOT system [Build, Operate and Transfer], the private sector could actively contribute to building power stations, airports as at *Marsa Allam*, roads and even harbours. Investors will soon be able to apply for the contracts for Dekhila airport and Port Said east harbour," said El-Ganzouri.

According to El-Ganzouri, the many offers made by gigantic companies for major development and investment projects in Egypt are a good indicator of the stability of the Egyptian economy. More than 41 companies, representing many different nationalities, are searching for crude oil, while another 63 companies applied for the Toshka water station project and an equal *number are seeking* active participation in the field of electricity. Moreover, the Egyptian Capital Market was the only one worldwide to record an increase as high as 8.2 per cent over the past three months. "Egypt has become an attractive market for foreign investment," El-Ganzouri said, adding that the volume of Arab investment during 1998 is expected to reach $20 billion. "This constitutes only 20 per cent of total in*vestment in Egypt," the prime minister* remarked.

"What we really need from Egyptian expatriates is a more active contribution to the process of development in Egypt," he added.

But when it came to what Egyptian expatriate businessmen want from the government, there was still no sign of an appropriately receptive attitude. Many have defined the lack of coordination among the different Egyptian authorities as *their main* worry. "It is easy to get a licence from the General Authority for Investment (GAI), but when you actually come to try and operate the project, you find yourself trapped in an endless maze of unnecessary procedures," said Salah Dwidar, general manager of Egyptians Abroad for Investment and Development. Dwidar said it was very important that investors should not have to deal with a dozen authorities all with conflicting interests.

A concrete example was given by Saad Abdel-Baset, who saw his costs triple when he *himself had to establish the* infrastructure for his 19,000 square-metre food industry project in Ismailia. "I bought the land on the basis that infrastructure would be supplied. That was not the case, and it cost me millions to pave the road and bring electricity, fresh water, and so on to the site. When the project started to operate, the city council then asked me to pay for the use of the infrastructure which I had installed myself," he said.

To top it all, Abdel-Baset started his $40m million project believing he had been granted a 10-year tax exemption. "To my great dismay, the government went back on its word and I was granted only five years' tax exemption," he said. In order to cope with the new situation, Abdel-Baset had to lay off half of the staff, estimated at 300 employees. Abdel-Baset had been determined to bring both his money and his expertise back to his native *land. Now he is actively considering throwing* in the towel. "Why should I waste time and money here, when I have another medicine factory to run in Germany? The facilities I am given there are incomparable," he said.

In the course of the discussions, it became obvious that the process of radical reform of the Egyptian economy is going too fast for the administrative authorities to be able to cope. "The decisions are taken promptly in *the minister's office, but when it comes to* putting them into practice, they somehow go astray," commented Salah Dwidar.

A visit to the Toshka valley was arranged the following day. The aim was to give businessmen an idea of what is going on there in the hope of attracting more investment to the area. Yet Dwidar made it clear that long-term investments are not exactly what Egyptian expatriates are looking for. "Short-term investments are more likely to attract them because they are looking for a rapid return on their capital," he said.

A *number of these businessmen have* already formed a LE100 million Toshka-oriented company, based in Egypt. "We are involved in housing, trading and environmental activities," said Dwidar.

One piece of good news for importers and exporters was brought by Mohieddin Gharib, minister of finance, who announced that the government is determined neither to increase the rate of existing taxes nor to impose new ones, *so as to encourage more rapid development.* By next July, a general reorganisation of the customs department is also scheduled to take place. "Shipments will no longer be held at the harbours for days on end and the importer will be able to have them released on the spot," he said.

This news was welcome to many importers, who have claimed that they have to deal with a veritable customs "mafia" in order to get *their shipments released.*

Orange exports in the red

Lower productivity, higher cost of production and lower demand abroad are the main reasons behind a drop in orange exports. Zeinab Abul-Gheit reports

Despite efforts by both the *private sector* and the government to boost exports of Egyptian oranges, indicators show that exports dropped in 1997.

According to the Ministry of Trade and Supply, orange exports totalled LE46.2 million from January to September 1996, while in the same period of 1997 the value fell to LE38.3 million. And the decline is expected to continue.

Exporter Ali Eisa said that he expects exports to drop by at least 15 per cent. He blamed the shortfall partly on the decrease of orange exports to Russia. "Egyptian exporters have opted out of this market because of the difficulty of collecting payments due to problems in the Russian banking system which is plagued by confusion and corruption. More*over*, the financial *crisis* in Southeast Asia closed that market for Egyptian exports as well," Eisa said.

He also blamed the low productivity of oranges in Egypt for the decline. "Farmers do not like to spend enough on combating pests and citrus diseases, which results in a weak crop," he said.

However, experts also say the high, uncompetitive prices of Egyptian oranges is still *the main factor for the decline of orange* exports. The lifting of subsidies on fertilisers and chemicals increases production costs and contributes to the high prices, which erode Egypt's competitive edge on world markets.

Mustafa 'Ads, manager of El-Wadi Exports Company, said that high prices are depriving Egypt of many of its traditional markets. "Russia now imports 70 per cent of its citrus fruits from Greece and only four per cent from Egypt despite the fact that Egyptian fruits are better in quality," 'Ads said.

Yaldiz Ishaq, a professor at the Horticultural Research Institute, said that faulty harvesting methods, as well as unsuitable transportation and packaging, adversely affect orange exports. Packaging companies still use certain preservative chemicals banned by European Community countries.

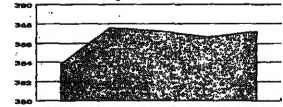
Ishaq said that some exporters damage the reputation of Egyptian oranges by exporting crops which do not conform to specifications. In many cases, consignments are sent back. Ishaq criticised the fact that control and inspection on exported commodities by the General Authority for Exports are no longer compulsory, enabling sub-quality exports to slip through.

Ishaq said that orange exports can only be promoted by establishing farms designated only for export, where ideal agricultural standards should be applied.

Efforts are being made by the government to increase production of citrus fruits, particularly in newly-reclaimed lands, by acquainting farmers with the best ways of utilising the land: fertilisation, irrigation and pruning for fighting pests and producing new seedlings.

Exporters are also trying to revive orange exports to Russia and Eastern Europe by establishing a company for marketing which will secure the collection of revenues of Egyptian exporters.

Market report



World acclaim for Eipico

THE CAPITAL Market seems to have just about recovered following a lengthy corrective movement that began almost a year ago. The market's general index retained its five-week upward trend through the week ending 26 March. Gaining 5.8 points, the index closed at 387.22.

Market analysts believe that the market has been energised by an increase in demand by foreign investors.

The week also witnessed an international appraisal of a listed Egyptian company. The Egyptian International Pharmaceutical Company, (Eipico), was recommended by Abn-Amro, a London-based securities group, as an investment opportunity with good growth prospects. A report issued by the group said that Eipico's projected price-earning ratio of 11.6 is ahead of its competitors in both Eastern Europe and India.

The Abn-Amro report, quoted by Reuters, also forecast the company's net annual profit as reaching LE110.4 million by the year 2000 compared to LE75.4 million it posted in 1997. According to Reuters, Eipico is the only Egyptian pharmaceutical producer to be included in the investable index of the International Finance Corporation, the World Bank's investment arm.

The banking and finance sector was the best performer of the week. With transactions amounting to LE31.4 million, the Commercial International Bank (CIB) cornered 8.27 per cent of the overall market turnover. CIB shares closed LE0.74 higher than its opening prices settling at LE61.55.

On the other hand, the Olympic Group for financial investments topped the market in terms of number of shares traded. The company's transactions accounted for 14.97 per cent of the number of shares changing hands through the week. It gained LE2.05 to close at LE16.54.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Quantifying quality

Another round of US shuttle diplomacy has failed, just like many previous attempts made during the past year by American diplomats, from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to special envoy Dennis Ross. Now, however, an ominous sign has appeared. The United States, instead of putting its foot down and pressing Israel to be flexible, has threatened to abandon its mediation altogether. Albright has been quoted as telling American Jewish leaders last weekend that the peace process is "not moving forward", and warning that "we cannot continue this way. One option is simply for us to remove ourselves from the process."

This revives the old question of whether the United States is unable or unwilling to put pressure on Israel. The US certainly has the means to do so, considering the billions of dollars in economic and military aid, as well as non-governmental assistance, that Israel receives, not to mention the strategic cooperation between the two countries.

Peacemaking efforts flopped this time when Israel rejected in advance an American plan brought by Ross to break the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock. As Ross was stepping off the plane, the Israeli cabinet branded as "unacceptable" the US proposal that Israel withdraw its troops from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank, insisting that no more than nine per cent could be ceded. Ross shuttled back and forth between Netanyahu and Arafat to sell the US plan. The Israelis adamantly refused, while the Palestinians indicated willingness to go along with it if they could get a moratorium on Israeli settlement construction. Then Israel offered to withdraw from nine per cent of "quality" land ensuring territorial contiguity for the Palestinians instead of the "quantity" redeployment involving disconnected pieces of land. The gimmick did not work: Arafat insisted he wanted "both quality and quantity".

The difference between nine per cent and 13.1 per cent sounds small in terms of abstract mathematics — and, in fact, of actual surface. Netanyahu has said that every percentage point involved equals about 75 square kilometres of land. But Palestinian statehood is at stake here — and this is not the bargain basement.

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd. West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris: Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Italy
Rome: Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bani, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.



Between time and justice

Illusions of unity or the reality of peace: how to overcome history's tyranny? **James Zogby** seeks answers in Ireland and Palestine

In many ways, the Irish question parallels the Palestine question. In recognition of this fact, the two peoples have, over the years, demonstrated reciprocal solidarity. Irish Republican manifestos in the early part of this century express their support for the "Arab people struggling against British imperialism." This has continued up to the present day, with the Irish government frequently taking strong positions in support of both Palestinian and Lebanese rights.

The roots of the oppression visited upon the Irish and the Arabs are similar. But there are differences as well. Long before the British introduced their brand of settler colonialism *to Palestine, using the Zionist movement as* their willing agents, they had imposed their regime on Ireland.

For centuries, the dominated Irish Catholic community lived under harsh British rule. They were denied freedom and basic rights in their own land. On a number of occasions, they rebelled and were brutally subdued. They were imprisoned or forced into exile. Their lands were confiscated.

The long and brutal history of British conquest took an immense toll on the land and its people. There are physical reminders everywhere. In every part of Ireland, there are the remains of destroyed Irish churches, castles, and forts, commingling with walls and mansions built by the occupiers to reinforce their rule.

The denial of Irish national and economic rights often had devastating human consequences. During the potato famine of the 1840s, for example, Ireland lost almost of its people — over one million to starvation, and another million forced to emigrate.

During the centuries of British rule, the Irish repeatedly rebelled. The rebellion after World War I, while exacting a heavy toll, finally resulted in Irish independence — but not for all of Ireland. The 26 counties of the south were declared the Republic of Ireland. The six counties of the north, in which lived the greatest concentration of Protestants, remained part of the United Kingdom.

The dream of a united Ireland, free of British rule, continues to dominate the political thinking of Irish nationalists in both the Republic and the north. At the same time the north's Protestant majority has fervently held to a desire to remain British citizens connected to the United Kingdom.

The *Irish* dream of a *united Ireland* is expressed in the constitution of the Republic of Ireland. Articles two and three, in part, declare that "the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and territorial seas." As citizens of the north, the Catholic population continued to suffer discrimination in employment, housing and politics. Their struggle for full civil rights *paralleled their aspiration to be part of a unified* Ireland.

When these Irish nationalists, as they are called, rose up in demonstrations, they were brutally suppressed. This suppression only served to further embolden them. As a result, for the past three decades the north has been a bloody battleground between some Irish nationalists who have waged a violent campaign against Britain and British forces and extremist Protestants militias who have wreaked retribution on the Catholic community.

After 30 years of violence, during which time almost 4,000 have been killed, the governments of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, together with most of the parties of Northern Ireland, embarked on peace talks to resolve the conflict.

The fact that talks are taking place is significant — but, after more than six months of negotiations, deep gaps still remain between the parties. At issue here are two conflicting ideologies with goals that are essentially incompatible. Both sides insist that they support *a democratic outcome that supports majority* rule and the right of "consent". To the nationalists that is interpreted to mean the majority of all Irish who seek the unity of Ireland, while to the Unionists "consent" means the right of the majority in the north to determine their fate — which continues to link them to Britain.

These are the views of the competing parties of the north. The governments of Britain and Ireland, tired of decades of conflict, have sought to create a compromise framework that would reconcile the conflicting claims. The proposals have sparked an intense debate throughout Ireland. The debate amongst the Irish over the requirement that the Republic *of Ireland change articles two and three* is especially fascinating. This issue fills the daily Irish press and radio call-in programmes, and is the subject of a number of public events.

The prime minister of the Republic, who is committed to this change, is facing a rebellion from some in his own party. His position, that the imperative to make peace should overrule ideology, is tempered by his assurance that the changes he will propose to the constitution will not do fundamental damage to the definition of the Irish nation.

Furthermore, the prime minister has sought to calm his supporters by insisting he will propose that changes be made only in the context of a total agreement on all outstanding issues.

Other Irish nationalists are deeply offended by the notion of any change at all. These nationalists refuse partition and the subsequent loss of Irish identity to any part or any people of the "Irish" territory. At present, however, it appears that the views of the government leading to a compromise are supported by the majority of Irish, north and south.

For this majority, the violence in the north has been unsettling. They want it to end. They want to build their society and get on with their lives. As one put it, "we can't continue to shape our future with the dead stones of the past. I would rather have the reality of peace than the illusion of unity." Such an assertion, of course, only serves to inflame the *ideological nationalists*.

While reflecting on the similarities between aspects of this Irish debate and the Palestinian debate over their charter and the peace process, it is interesting to note the differences as well. In the first place the Irish are beginning from a point where they control 26 counties and have a Republic. In Palestine, it was the settlers who won. In Palestine, it is the Israeli state that is demanding that the occupied Palestinians change their charter, while no similar demand has been placed on the Israelis to change *either the charters of their parties* (that support *Eretz Israel*) or their racist law of return and the absentee property law that allows Israel to continue to dispossess Palestinians and Israeli Arabs of land and their rights.

In the case of Ireland, the oppressed minority community of the dismembered north has, to some extent, the support of the state to the south. Because the Palestinian track has been severed from *the other Arab tracks* to the peace process, the occupied Palestinians stand alone in a vulnerable position, with no leverage.

Finally, the Irish have worked in recent years to cultivate support from the Irish American community, which has some strong nationalist currents within it. Despite the centrality of the US-British relationship, the Irish *American community* has made inroads in US politics and created sufficient pressure requiring the Administration to balance its British policy with its Irish policy. This has contributed to a more or less evenhanded US policy *in the Irish peace process*.

Even if an agreement like the one proposed by the two governments is accepted by the major competing parties in the North, the legacy of a long history of oppression and racism will continue to take its toll on the Irish, as it continues to take its toll in the Middle East.

The Irish, like the Arabs, don't easily forget their history.

History is important. But history can either be mastered by our determination to create a new reality, or history can be a tyrant that masters us and locks us in the past.

In Ireland, as in the Middle East, there are, *for better or worse*, two distinct peoples who now live in one land. Just as the nationalists must recognise this and accept it, the other party must recognise that they live in an Irish sea and must accommodate themselves to coexistence and equality. *History* can be overcome, but only through justice.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Living with water shortage [3]

Last month's Paris conference on global water shortage raised fundamental questions concerning the sustainability of life on Earth. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses this new problematic

After the International Conference on Water and Sustainable Development held in Paris last *month, the world will never be* the same. For it has been told in no uncertain terms, in the Final Declaration of the conference, that potable water, the very basis of life on Earth, is on the verge of becoming critically scarce. The irony is that this should be happening at a time of promise, when humankind has every right to believe that, as it stands on the eve of a new millennium, its dreams of a better tomorrow are more likely than ever before to materi*alise thanks to the dramatic break*throughs being realised by modern science and technology every day.

A major debate in the conference was over how elastic water is. That is, can potable water be substantially increased in volume to face the challenge, not only of its decrease in quantity, but also of its depreciation in quality, because of man-made pollution? In other words, will humankind have to accommodate to an ever more serious water shortage, or can water be made to accommodate to ever-growing human needs?

This basic question raised the issue of how future priorities *should be decided. However, it is* important here not to lose sight of a basic discrepancy between the two terms of the question. The lack of symmetry is evident: while it is true that potable water is indispensable for human life, human life cannot be seen in terms of water alone. Water is a necessary, but not sufficient, con*dition for human welfare*. Therefore, it is more reasonable to assume that water should be adapted to human requirements than the other way round.

But adapting water to human needs will depend on how *elastic* water can be, which means, among other things, to what extent potable water can be mass-produced. The only source from which considerable amounts of water can be extracted is the seas and oceans covering much of the *earth's surface*. Can sea water be perceived as *naturally polluted* water, i.e., water that is 'contaminated' by salt, so that the problem is reduced to discovering a means by which the tremendous reservoirs of sea and ocean water can be depolluted and rendered fit for human consumption? It is worth noting in this regard that when it comes to separating salt from sea water it is not difficult to retain the salt by evaporating the water, while it is far more difficult, and very costly, to retain the water without the salt.

Advocates of the theory that humans in future will have to accommodate to the new conditions *of water scarcity* argue that to focus on the desalination of sea water, a process that is still prohibitively expensive, is to chase after a chimera, while neglecting the urgent need to rationalise and optimise the use of sweet water actually available and all too often wasted or polluted in an irresponsible manner.

In defence of more water discipline, the conference discussed the idea of *pricing* water, that is, of using *economic deterrents*, to discourage its waste. In other words, of relinquishing the deeply rooted assumption that water should be perceived as a 'gift' of God, or of Nature. That this assumption is well entrenched in the Egyptian psyche is best illustrated by the famous statement attributed to the Islamic conqueror of Egypt, Amr Ibn El-Aass, who described *Egypt as a 'gift of the Nile'*. As such, its water cannot be priced. The image of Egypt as a *hydraulic society* based on irrigation goes against the notion that water can be priced. *Since* the time of the Pharaohs, the legitimacy of the Egyptian state has been based on ensuring that all Egyptians obtain their requirements of water free of charge. The Conference questioned whether this assumption was not becoming self-defeating with the growing lag between demand and supply as potable water becomes scarcer worldwide. This issue will be discussed in more detail in our next article.

But advocates of the idea that *Man, not water, should shape* future developments and that potable water should — and *can* — be created, respond by asking why it is legitimate to assume that the *AIDS* virus, or cancer, can be defeated, while it is not legitimate to postulate that humankind can stand up to the threat of its demise because of water shortage. Such a *postulate does not run counter to* the idea of rationalising the use of existing sources of potable water, but, on the contrary, complements it. Both attempts should run in parallel, those at optimising the use of available sources of water and those at creating new sources, whether by conventional or non-conventional means.

The conference admitted that neither objective could be dismissed. The implicit meaning behind that admission was that the *era of global water shortage* has begun. Hence the idea of establishing an Academy of Water, whose main responsibility would be to mobilise all available means to redress the disbalances provoked by this new threat. The head of the Egyptian delegation, renowned scientist and president of the World Water Council, Minister Mahmoud Abu Zeid, proposed that Egypt host the Water Academy. The International conference on Water and Sustainable *Development is still a French* initiative outside the UN framework. Yet more than eighty states sent delegates to the conference. And its findings will be submitted to a special session of the United Nations' General Assembly before the end of this month. There is no moving backwards into a world where the issue of water shortage does not occupy central stage.

Objective battles

By Naguib Mahfouz

Writers like El-Aqqad, Taha Hussein, El-Mazni and Heikal, the pioneers of modern Egyptian thought, taught us about our own heritage from a modern scientific perspective. These men made European thought accessible long before we could say two words in English or French.

They were especially concerned with objectivity and scrupulous honesty, which transcended political affiliations. They never succumbed to the petty values which divide great minds into categories like right- and left-wing. El-Aqqad, Heikal and Hussein fought fiercely in their respective party newspapers, but when a book by Heikal was published, it was cri*tiqued by El-Aqqad with a rigor*ous sense of objectivity and fairness. I was a Wafdist, but my reference books in literature were the works of Heikal and Taha Hussein, both declared opponents of the Wafd.

The rift between right and left in literature is unfortunately still a reality today. For some, it is difficult to forget political differences and give a literary work a chance on its own terms. To consider political opponents literary enemies is the *attitude* responsible for the corruption of the public's taste today.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week Comrades-in-arms

Al-Mussawar: "It is bad luck for those Copts living abroad, who allege that their co-religionists in Egypt are persecuted, that a delegation from the churches of New York branded these allegations as outright lies. But we cannot rely on more visits such as these every time some Copts living abroad make false accusations. We are, therefore, delighted by the statement of Dr Edward El-Zahaby, a prominent Coptic lawyer, in which he reveals the lies about Copts being persecuted in Egypt. But he should have sent his statement to the US State Department rather than the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since it is the former which puts out reports about Coptic persecution on the Internet."
(Abdel-Qader Shoheib, 27 March)

Al-Gomhuria: "There is no doubt that there are hidden hands behind campaigns being waged against Egypt from time to time whenever it expresses its views frankly on US aid, whenever the Egyptian economy improves, whenever it insists on an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon and rejects the 'Lebanon first' proposal, insisting that the Golan must be returned to its rightful owners. Unfortunately, these hidden hands exploit some of our brother Copts abroad, causing them to err."
(Samir Ragab, 26 March)

Al-Akhbar: "We are concerned about the imperialist theory, which Huntington calls the clash of civilisations, that would have us believe that the imperialist world is looking for a new enemy after the collapse of communism and that the enemy could well be Islam. If there is a clash between religions, what will be the position of Arab Christians? Historically, Arab Christians stood by Muslims during the Crusades. And Egypt's Copts have a long record of defending their country against 40 armed incursions, including British colonialism and the 1973 October War. Their unwavering stand stems from the fact that Egyptian Copts participated in forming Egypt's political and intellectual base which helped espouse Arab nationalism. And their understanding of Islam differs from that of Western Christians. They are part of the Islamic civilisation which encompasses the heritage of Pharaonic, Greek, Roman and Coptic phases of our history. As for the West, it regards Islam as an enemy to be done away with. Historically, therefore, Arab Christians have sided with their fellow Arabs in any clash, military or otherwise, between Western and Islamic civilisations."
(Gamal Asaad, 27 March)

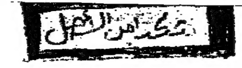
Al-Wafd: "The words of Pope Shenouda III have come like a sword to cut off the head of the viper which has been spreading lies about the Copts of Egypt. Unfortunately, these lies are being propagated by some Copts living abroad who have formed dubious organisations, like the World Federation of Copts. They also recently took out a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* inciting Congress to take punitive measures against Egypt because Copts have allegedly been denied a place in modern Egypt."
(Gamal Badawy, 27 March)

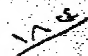
October: "Yes, there are problems but these have to be solved through an Egyptian perspective. We cannot look at Egyptian reality through American eyes. Each nation has its own standards and values emanating from its culture and history. The Western mind cannot really unravel what constitutes an Egyptian."
(Ismail Muntasser, 29 March)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



The face of the late Elias Freij, who served as mayor of Bethlehem for 25 years, and who died this week of heart and kidney failure, is a map of regional politics. The Palestinians' heartbreak, bitterness and determination against all odds are etched into the sad lines of his cheeks; his lips are parted, and he seems to be essaying a smile, but his eyes are steady: no hint of merriment there. As I drew it, I felt that his face could be stretched this way and that, like a large, round ball — but it would always spring back to its original shape.





Close up

Salama A. Salama

Officious business

The bill on the protection of the rights of religious minorities currently under review by the House of Representatives, and already approved by the Committee on Foreign Relations, has aroused anger and indignation among Egypt's Copts. They have been unanimous in rejecting US interference and the attempt to fragment national unity by fomenting conflicts between Christians and Muslims.

This misguided bill was *put on the table by fanatics*, and exploited by openly Zionist hard-liners in Congress and elsewhere; it attempts to be both judge and spokesman for the Copts of Egypt — no less. The bill seeks to give America the right to monitor the religious situation in Egypt, and to impose sanctions on *governments* accused of violating the rights of minorities. In its preliminary version, the bill designated several states, including Egypt, Sudan, China and Saudi Arabia. In its amended version, names of states were omitted and the responsibility for monitoring religious persecution was withdrawn from the White House — only to be handed over to the State Department.

It may be absurd to claim that there are no problems in Egypt, or that Copts are not suffering as much as their Muslim compatriots. But suffering is one thing; giving the US or any other state the right to interfere, impose sanctions, or play the role of policeman, judge and journalist all in one, threatening to cut aid if Egypt rejects the terms of US interference, is quite another. Such a scenario is a harsh reminder of the darkest days of colonialism, with one difference: the high commissioner of the British Empire has been replaced by an American. The bill reflects a US intent on imposing its hegemony over the world community, threatening national unity by encouraging civil strife, creating and fostering divisions, and forcing its protection on sovereign nation-states, thereby denying them the right to solve their own problems autonomously as one country and one nation.

Racial repression and discrimination in the US exist at all levels of society, from key state positions to the *courtrooms* and the police. No institution in the US is truly free of discrimination.

The international community must take a stand against the US's repeated attempts to enact legislation *empowering* it to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries. The EU has been down this road before, when it opposed US legislation to prohibit relations with Iran, Cuba and other countries without securing the support of the international community — in other words, the US's violation of *UN resolutions. EU* countries threatened to reciprocate by boycotting US companies if the US were to carry out its threat. The crisis is still unresolved. China is in a similar situation.

By allowing a delegation of American church representatives to enter Egypt on a fact-finding mission — in other words, on a mission to find incidents of religious persecution — Egypt has been too tolerant. The delegation found nothing to report — but the authority to acquit implies the authority to condemn. Taking things into our own hands and assuming full responsibility for our problems without interference from other parties is our only option. We must make it clear that the US's policy is intolerable.

To address the US bill at the international level, Egypt may have to coordinate its policy with Saudi Arabia and thus present a united front against US intervention. The Arab League *would* also be well advised to put this item on its agenda of the *forthcoming* Council meeting. If no action is taken, we will be forced to answer to a state which presents itself as the ultimate arbiter, but which has no knowledge of reality in our society.



Soapbox

A tough code to crack

The Code of Ethics for the press, approved by the General Assembly of the Supreme Press Council on 26 March, has taken effect.

The public has the right to know the major outlines of the code, especially items pertaining to a journalist's right and duty to obtain accurate and truthful information. One of the general principles states: "The press is an instrument of dialogue and interaction; journalists must abide by the rules and etiquette of dialogue, take into account the right to comment, reply and correct. The public has the right to *protection against invasion of privacy and to human dignity.*" Article 5 states that "the press is particularly responsible for the protection of public morals, human rights, the rights of women and children, the rights of the family, the rights of minorities and intellectual property.

According to Article 7 of the General Principles, "the Press Syndicate is the legal framework within which journalists rally to defend the profession and its rights."

The syndicate has several high priorities: to respect the traditions, ethics and principles of the profession, implement the Code of Conduct, call violators to account in ac*cordance with the procedures prescribed in the Press Syn*dicate Law and the Press Regulation Law.

The Code of Conduct must be implemented in letter and spirit, with a view to institutionalising a tradition which journalists will observe, and which will guarantee that accurate information is available to the public, particularly during elections. The Code of Conduct is similar to a constitution binding both the communicator and the recipient: a true model *of democracy, worthy of emulation.*



This week's Soapbox speaker is a professor of journalism and a member of the Supreme Press Council.

Khalil Sabat

Out of Lebanon?

Israel's quagmire could well be Lebanon's quandary, writes **Hassan Nafaa**

Israel's announcement that it wanted to withdraw from southern Lebanon in implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 425 did not surprise me much. When I went to the University of California in Los Angeles in 1996 as a visiting professor, an academic close to decision-making circles in the Arab-Israeli *peace process confided in me that Israel was seriously* studying the possibility of taking a unilateral decision to withdraw from southern Lebanon. The professor asked me how I thought such a step might affect the peace process. I told him it would depend on Israel's true intentions in taking such a step. If unilateral withdrawal was merely a tactical manoeuvre intended to separate the Syrian and Lebanese negotiating tracks and to embarrass and isolate Syria, it would only create additional complications and further harm the peace process. If, on the other hand, this move was intended as an affirmation of Israel's commitment to withdrawing from all occupied Arab territories, it would be a positive step.

In all events, I said, Israel must first reassure Syria and offer sufficient guarantees that it intends to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights at a later phase if it wants to ensure Syria's cooperation in maintaining security in southern Lebanon following the withdrawal. Without Syria's cooperation, it will be impossible to make any progress towards a settlement that will lead to a true peace.

When I asked my interlocutor what he thought Israel's motives might be in taking such a decision, he gave me an enigmatic smile and a short, equivocal an*swer implying that Israel's immediate goal at present* was to compound the pressure on Syria.

Now, two years after this conversation, it appears that Israeli decision-makers have summoned their resolve. One can only ask: why did Israel wait 20 years before announcing that it was prepared to implement Resolution 425, which, until today, it has refused to even recognise? Is Israel really serious in its intent to withdraw from southern Lebanon unilaterally and unconditionally? An answer to this question can only be found in an examination of Israel's policy in Lebanon.

Zionist thinking has always tended to view Lebanon as the primary weak point in the Arab order, and the delicate denominational equilibrium of the Lebanese polity as the key to imposing Israel's conditions for a settlement on the Arab world. Simultaneously, Israeli strategists knew that Lebanon would never offer an opening wide enough for Israel to breach as long as the *Arabs remained united behind a single set of con*ditions for a settlement. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Israel began to implement its strategy in Lebanon in the immediate wake of President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.

In order to meet their strategic objectives, the Israelis needed a Maronite officer ready to cooperate with Israel, who would then serve as the focal point for a more far-reaching operation aimed at splintering Lebanon into small, mutually hostile petty states, in preparation for inflicting the same fate upon the other nations *surrounding Israel. The sectarian warfare that* erupted at that time in Lebanon helped Israel find the ally it was looking for: Saad Haddad.

Everything was in place for phase one of the Israeli strategy, and, on 15 March 1978, Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon. "Operation Litani", as the Israelis called it, caused the destruction of dozens of villages and forced more than 120,000 Lebanese farming families to flee their homes. The Israelis consigned the administration of the Occupied Territories to their proxy, Haddad, who then broke with the leadership of the Lebanese army.

Phase two of the strategy began only a few months after the death of President Sadat. In June 1982 Israe*li forces invaded Lebanon again and advanced up to* Beirut. After forcing the PLO command to leave Beirut, they imposed a proxy government that was coerced at gunpoint into signing a peace treaty with Israel. The end of this phase was supposedly intended to create a Maronite state to the north of Israel, bound to Israel by a peace agreement, and to set into motion the disintegration of the Arab east into sectarian petty states, with Israel controlling the balance of power between them. The winds of change in Lebanon were not blowing in Israel's favour, however. A series of suicide bombings forced the American and multinational peacekeeping forces to leave, and the May 1983 peace treaty collapsed with the first strike of the Lebanese resistance.

If Israel had intended to implement Resolution 425 of 1978, which calls for an unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of occupied Lebanese territories, *it could have done so unilaterally* in 1983. After all, there are no clauses in the resolution calling for negotiations or security arrangements. Israel, however, had no inclination whatsoever to withdraw from southern Lebanon, even after the American and multinational peacekeeping forces withdrew. It had not yet given up on its strategy in southern Lebanon.

Israeli *strategists* had believed that the *presence of* Israeli forces in its self-declared security zone, in conjunction with the continued cooperation of its ally, the South Lebanese Army (SLA), would so inhibit the stabilisation of the domestic front in Lebanon that Israel would be able to bide its time until more propitious circumstances offered themselves for a renewed attack, thereby putting itself in a position to impose a peace treaty upon a proxy Maronite government.

Israel has used all means imaginable to prevent Lebanon from *falling* under *Syrian influence* and to perpetuate the civil war in Lebanon. It has failed on both counts. Syria was able to take advantage of the circumstances generated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to depose Michel Aoun and then to create conditions favourable to securing a commitment to the Taif Agreement and an end to the civil war. Moreover, the Lebanese *resistance* began to *organise itself more* effectively and to inflict increasingly severe losses on Israeli forces and the SLA. Lebanon fell prey to a momentous battle of wills, during which Israel launched repeated strikes on southern Lebanon with the aim of driving the populace out, undermining popular support for the resistance and thus augmenting pressure on the north so as to spark a renewed outbreak of civil war. Again, Israeli strategy floundered. And so drastic were the costs of having to sustain failure after failure that the Israeli government had no al*ternative but to give serious thought to withdrawal.*

While the failure of "Operation Grapes of Wrath" can be said to mark the turning point in Israeli thinking, the Israeli government only made the decision to withdraw when it finally determined that it was impossible to impose its will in southern Lebanon. As the Lebanese resistance grew increasingly intractable, Israel began to find itself mired in its own Vietnam. And, as the cries of the mothers of the Israeli victims in southern Lebanon grew shriller, and the continued presence of Israeli forces in Lebanon threatened to divide Israeli opinion as no other issue has, the question of withdrawal was given ever higher priority on the government's agenda. Thus, only after Israeli strategy *in Lebanon proved utterly disastrous did the political* elite begin to seriously entertain the idea of abandoning that strategy. It is a poignant irony that Sharon, the architect of Israel's Lebanon strategy and the criminal responsible for the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, is now one of the most ardent advocates of withdrawal.

Unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon can only have one meaning — that Israel was defeated in Lebanon and has been forced to accept the conditions of the victor. Israel, however, cannot admit to defeat in Lebanon at present, for to do so would strengthen the position of the armed resistance in all the occupied Arab territories, and indeed bolster all forces opposed to a political settlement on Israel's terms, which in turn would threaten to upset the balance of powers arrayed against Israel in the long term.

Israeli strategists were thus confronted with two un*palatable and irreconcilable alternatives. On one hand,* they feared that an unconditional withdrawal might set into motion a general strategic regression that would weaken Israel's negotiating position. On the other hand, to continue to refuse to withdraw from Lebanon would entail further losses of Israeli soldiers, whose lives, the political elite has begun to think, cost *far more* than any *possible* advantages of holding on to the territory. To complicate matters, however, unconditional withdrawal would also entail Israel's acceptance of some 20,000 members of the SLA as political refugees. This would convey a potent message to others in the Arab world whose faith in their prospects of regaining their usurped rights has weakened. The message would read: to place your bets on Israel, whether out of intimidation or greed, is a losing proposition. Israeli strategists are only too conscious of the ominous ramifications such a message might have for Israel's future.

It appears too early, therefore, to speak of an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. Rather, one suspects that the recent Israeli declaration of its willingness to implement Resolution 425 reflects a desire to withdraw, but with as few losses as possible and without having to relinquish its long-term objectives in Lebanon. It is important to note, in this context, that the interpretation it forwarded of the requirements for putting this resolution into effect does not conform with the text or spirit of the resolution. First, Israel demands that Lebanon should negotiate over the implementation of Resolution 425, although the resolution makes no provision whatsoever for direct negotiations. The Israelis, however, have referred to an article of the resolution that delineates the responsibilities of an international force that could be created by the Security Council in order to monitor *the withdrawal of the Israeli forces: to restore inter*national peace and security; and to help the Lebanese government to resume its effective authority in the area. Israel claims that the clause "to restore international peace and security" can only be fulfilled through joint security arrangements that must be formulated through direct negotiations with the Lebanese.

Israel's objective here is twofold: to separate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in the peace process and to force the Lebanese government into taking several measures guaranteeing "security" — Israel's, that is — before Israeli forces withdraw from Lebanon.

Israel's second demand is that the Lebanese govern*ment must dismantle the Hizbullah bases and amnesty* members of the SLA, incorporating them into the national Lebanese army; yet, simultaneously, permit them to remain in the south in order to protect Israel. In other words, not only does Israel seek to separate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in the negotiations, it wants to encumber the Lebanese government with the task of eliminating the Lebanese resistance at its own expense. And should Lebanon refuse to do the "dirty work", it will be easy for Israel to assert that Syrian pressures are preventing Lebanon from negotiating with Israel and are, therefore, the obstacle to Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. Syria is not interested in the welfare of Lebanon, the Israelis will say. It is only using Lebanon as leverage to get the Israelis out of the Golan. Syria, therefore, is perpetuating the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.

Israel clearly has not abandoned its strategy of in*citing renewed civil warfare in Lebanon, and it* continues to wager on using a Lebanese party to serve as its proxy in order to accomplish its aims. Israel's propositions are, in effect, the remnants of a strategy that failed, but which Israel wants to revive in new packaging.

The only conclusion one can draw from recent de*velopments in the Israeli-Lebanese sphere is that Israel* has come to the realisation that it is impossible to impose a military solution on the Lebanese front and, consequently, that its occupation of the south of Lebanon is no longer viable in light of the current balance of powers. Israel, however, remains unconvinced that it has suffered a total defeat in Lebanon that should compel it to withdraw unconditionally. It still believes that it has a large margin in which to manoeuvre. We can therefore expect that Israel will continue to attempt to use the French, or even the UN (in spite of its *contempt for that organisation) to ensure the lowest* possible losses.

Israel's success in this endeavour will depend on a number of factors, especially the solidity of the domestic front in Lebanon, the strength of Syrian-Lebanese relations and the vigilance of the Arab world.

If Israel could have remained in Lebanon by force of arms, it would have. If it estimates that it is no longer able to sustain the costs of its occupation, then it must leave. There is no need for negotiations with the Lebanese government. The Security Council can always send additional international forces to supervise the Israeli withdrawal and to help the Lebanese forces protect the Lebanese people in the south from aggression, the source of which has invariably been Israel. If Israel is concerned for the lives of its citizens in the north, it can reinforce its forces along the border. And, if it finds itself unable to do this, it, too, can ask the UN to station peacekeeping forces on its side of the border to perform this task on behalf of, or in cooperation with, the Israeli army.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Within these walls

Will all members of the "yellow press" please stand up? Having followed the "yellow journalism" uproar of the past few weeks — much of which took place on the pages of newspapers and magazines, both as reports and as commentary — I find myself *at a loss to understand what the term is supposed to* designate. Basically, we seem to be left with the single option of waiting for the presumed culprits themselves to stand up and make a clean breast of it all.

True, one Cyprus-licensed newspaper, the weekly *Al-Dustour*, has been shut down; and Adel Hammouda, the deputy editor of the national weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*, was transferred from his post, but was welcomed as a staff writer in *Al-Ahram*. Another Cyprus-licensed newspaper, the bi-weekly English-language *Cairo Times* had one of its issues banned; a number of newspapers and editors are reportedly under investigation by either the Supreme Press Council or the Press Syndicate; three journalists are in prison — "incidentally", since the libel law under which they were sentenced predates the whole "yellow journalism" outcry by decades. Meanwhile, the Press Syndicate has vowed to enforce its long-dormant Code of Ethics.

It is difficult to derive any "system" from all this, however, other than the creation of an overall climate of fear and intolerance of press freedom. The difficulty is compounded once these disparate "measures" are contrasted with the recent outpouring of statements and commentaries on "yellow journalism". *Rose El-Youssef* has been exonerated from the stigma, and its writers have been at pains to exculpate not *only their magazine*, but also the *defunct Al-Dustour* — which is just as well, since by all rights *Al-Dustour* was, more or less, a broadsheet version of *Rose El-Youssef*. One of the earliest and fiercest denunciations of yellow journalism was a full-page article written by the editor of *Al-Osbou'*, which, at least to my mind, was a latter-day, if decidedly less liberal, version of *Al-Dustour*. Unlike *Al-Dustour*, however, *Al-Osbou'* had benefit of a rare Supreme Press Council licence.

To make matters even more confusing, the chief editor of *Rose El-Youssef* has attributed the closure of *Al-Dustour* and the transfer of Adel Hammouda to a plot to discredit Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif! To all this we might add the barrage of whispered allegations that a certain entrepreneur (whose identity varies widely in different versions of the story) had planted the alleged statement that Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya was warning three top Coptic businessmen to leave the country or be killed. It is the publication of this statement by *Al-Dustour*, and later by *Rose El-Youssef*, that triggered the yellow journalism outcry.

More and more, then, yellow journalism appears as a phantom that is haunting us all, but remains illusive and intangible. Can the whole fuss have been about a few, largely unknown Cyprus-licensed newspapers of almost negligible circulation, and which, moreover, have not been banned? Yet, incidentally or not, three journalists are in prison for libel offences, with more to come if the number of cases currently in the courts is anything to go by. *Al-Dustour* may have been as white as the driven snow, but it has been closed down. Journalism is beset by a climate of fear from within and intolerance from without. These are all tangibles. As illusive as it seems to be, the phantom of yellow journalism is extracting a heavy price.

It is also impossible to hold a serious and healthy debate on journalistic ethics under these conditions. As I wrote last week, thousands of Egyptian citizens — neither businessmen, officials nor the increasingly prevalent combination of the two — are libeled every year on the strength of police statements. This is but one of the many problems raised by a discussion of journalistic ethics, one which, moreover, has been neglected by the bulk of the discussion of "yellow journalism".

The fact remains, however, that for such a discussion to be at all fruitful, more than finger-pointing and protestations of innocence, it needs to be conducted in a non-coercive climate. Journalists cannot be asked to take a critical look at themselves in the shadow of a prison wall.

To The Editor

Infantry blues

Sir- First, allow me to express my gratitude as regards the *Weekly*'s adoption of several of my personal pet causes, first and foremost the preservation of our architectural heritage. *It always distresses me no end to see a makeshift* wall go up around one of Maadi's splendid villas, and the inevitable jackhammers move into place. Recently, I was devastated to discover that a villa formerly belonging to a dear friend of mine — now departed from this world — and in the garden of which I remember spending many a happy summer day, has been replaced by a gaping hole.

I hope it is not too bold of me to suggest that the Weekly take up another cause: reclaiming the footpaths of Egypt. Drivers may well rant at the pedestrians occupying space that should belong only to automobiles, but when one is on the other side of the track, so to speak, one soon discovers that the pedestrians have by far the worst lot.

The vendors on the footpaths are the least of our problems; more to the point, why are footpaths occupied by parked cars? Why is it virtually impossible to walk more than three metres on the footpath without stumbling over a loose paving stone, or having a frighteningly close encounter with a large hole? It is also a bitter irony that Cairo's few scrawny trees are planted smack in the middle of the footpath. In a word, sir, we need to raise the battle cry: give us back our footpaths!

Dr Laila Shibukshi
Shubra


photo: Sherif Sonbol

No time for kissing

Princes came and went, but **David Blake** found it difficult to wake up with this production

The Sleeping Beauty, The Bolshoi Ballet of Russia and the Cairo Opera Orchestra; Algis Jiuraitis, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 25 March

No time for anger either — just sorrow. The ballet *La Belle aux Bois Dormant* — *La Belle* — was produced in St Petersburg in 1890. By 1893 the great Russian snow bear of music who conceived it was dead. It is, therefore, almost a radiant sigh of relief from Mount Olympus where Tchaikovsky, if there is any justice, must have been given refuge from the sins and injustices of the world. The *Belle* is a simple thing, vast but organised with the implacable order of Bach's preludes and fugues. No irony, no double think, not a vestige of mannerism or literary condescension.

It abounds with fairies, but don't get it wrong. Tchaikovsky knew his world and what was in it. Better call the fairies of *La Belle* "essence" — perfumes, or vestiges *sans ombres* as Hoffmansthal called them.

What caused sorrow was not the masterpiece, but the Bolshoi's handling of it. *La Belle*, like another tale, *La Belle et la Bete*, is about evil and the conquering of it by faith. Perrault's *Belle* allowed Tchaikovsky to abandon the ritual orgasms of the human race — war, death, destruction and sex — and use the poem as an antidote to these poisons. He created a work showing how love, light and faith can be invincible. Maybe banal and dotty food for the '90s of the 20th century, but valid in the inspired hemisphere of *La Belle*. Tchaikovsky's methods are as simple and direct as Bach. For every *enchainment* of the dance is a musical construction, and for every colour in the music, a happening. If you like mauve-lilac you are lucky with *La Belle* because this colour opens the long work: through acts and hours it seeps through the tissues of the composition up to the awesome concluding apotheosis which closes the work. Lilac has prevailed in one of the most alluring melodies Tchaikovsky ever wrote, and the colour belongs to the true heroine of the ballet, the Lilac Fairy.

Listening to *La Belle* always brings the salutary thought that without Tchaikovsky the classic ballet would not have existed. The problem with *La Belle* is it needs everything and the best. It is the ultimate classic ballet, the vademecum of action, body plus soul and steely strength hidden by grace and order. Who wants these things today? They are out-of-date. Then drop it into the first balletic mausoleum you come across and treat it like the mortified pharaohs.

Its secret is Perrault and the story which supports the musical architecture. All these considerations seem to have been overlooked by this Bolshoi production. What became of the big brand name team this visit? They are not first, second or even third battalion troops. Even so, they more or less came in rags. Did the dust of the *khamaseen* upset them? Did the set-up of the tour prove too arduous? The *Don Quixote* was almost quite bad: the *Belle*, a sort of wandering wilderness. No one wants ever to see these standards at the Bolshoi. If the caryatids of this huge company falter...

Firstly, there was no atmospheric splendour. You must come to terms with childhood on its own terms in this ballet. Tchaikovsky and Petipa did. In this production, there was no setting. Better it had been done with lights and colour as the Lithuanian company did with their wonder of *Romeo and Juliet*. Better just space than the rags which were ruthlessly revealed as they shot up and down in the scene changes.

Costumes were Louis Quatorze and did well enough, but looked time-worn and battle-scarred. *La Belle*, anyway, is not a touring ballet, and to perform it in this way is to destroy it.

No forest. The entire tale is set in forests which supply its title. No leaves loomed. The beautiful walk through the forest by the Lilac Fairy as she leads the Prince to the Sleeping Beauty was a travesty. The somnolent royal court were already busy, wide awake and waiting for the Prince to come in and wake them. The wake-up kiss of the Prince was a pretty hurried affair. After waiting a century, she deserves something better. Then came a brisk march up the stairs of the palace and out of sight.

Earlier, in the Prologue, Petoukhov, the evil spirit Carabosse, and his rat-pack were suitably rodent-like. And, to her beautiful signature tune, the Lilac Fairy appeared at last. Small, petite and neat, she made no impression as the gorgeous music swirled about her. She knew not how important she was supposed to be. Sad for what was to come.

The production funked the fairies. They were presented as so many nice, practical girls doing their bit for the school break-up. And so bang went shadowland and the ballerina mystique.

Act I gave the audience a first view of Aurora, the Sleeping Beauty in person. Hers is possibly the most august entrance in all ballet. Tchaikovsky adored the stars, and he gives this one time for everything. A. Antonitcheva, the Aurora of this production, came down the staircase at her entrance as cool as Turandot, and so she remained for the evening: very tall, thin, endless legs and arms and a manner all her own to suggest she was doing us a favour by dancing at all. She was good in some terms, passable *en l'air*, her movements were certainly grand, but she carried no weight in her body, and certainly none as the young princess who loves to dance.

Came the first big set-piece — the Rose Adage in which each of the four foreign princes invited to her birthday present her with a rose. She takes the flowers doing elaborate turns and beauteous arabesques to ever-increasing tempo and the temperature rises. At least that's how it should be. But Antonitcheva remained chill as sherbert, completely ignoring the character of Aurora and also the explicit sexual content of the music. When the act ended thoughts were: how will she cope with what is to come? We had not long to wait.

Act II gave the Hunt. The orchestra of the Cairo Opera was doing its best, with not much help from the conductor. His prime duty was to see that the steps went correctly, not to give any beauty to the music itself. So it went dry, no glamour.

The Prince looked a treat. Like Aurora, tall and thin with a wide open Russian face. He resembles the great Eglevsky, but only facially. Aurora comes on as a vision to show the Prince what is waiting for him in the sleeping palace over the lake. Again the long legs and arms and cool face. Maybe as a vision she could have been more vivid than in life. But no, spirit or person, we had seen what the package was. So we settled back and waited for the climax at the end.

Perhaps it was thought that a brisk Aurora with only one intermission helps keep the spirits up. But, as Act II slid into Act III with no breaking point at all, we were soon to see that even a slight rest may have been a life-saver to the cast. The wedding, Aurora's wedding, the one act tight-packed version made by Diaghelev for travelling purposes would have suited this company better in its present condition.

The bright faceless fairies came and went. The usually eagerly awaited Blue Bird *pas de deux* also came and went — she, heavy with noisy landings, he, thin as a blade and slow. No razzle to the famous beats and *toures en l'air*.

And so, to what used to be the climax of the ballet — rich, dazzling, sexy and dangerous: Aurora and her Prince on their wedding eve.

A mood of tension struck the house. Both dancers seemed to have grown taller. High enough for the cat walk of a couture show, but not an Opera House with Tchaikovsky surging up from the orchestral pit. As the great physical union of these two sexually disposed creatures began their almost scorpion-like darting and retreating courtship ritual lashing the air, the whole thing went cool. The heart, and more so the body, had gone out of the greatest showpiece in classical ballet. Aurora seemed shaky on her pins and the boy got his timing wrong. She slid a few steps and began to teeter and quiver as the music surged to its climax. The choreography was a simplified version, and as Aurora grabbed the support of her prince's outstretched arm we breathed a sigh of relief. Aurora had got home, but only just.

And this was sad for the Bolshoi.

No one ever wishes to criticise a Bolshoi dancer, but maybe Vaganova, ballerina *assoluta* and pedagogue, had it right when she said a dancer's legs, male or female, are their life. Dancers are not ordinary people. For the rest of us, a certain flab is natural, but a classical dancer needs muscles. We need to see them. They are splendid. It makes us feel safe.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Rabab Nimr
Khan Al-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 3 April.
Works under the title Black: White.

Collective Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 5 April.
Works by Abu Bakr El-Nawawy, Galal El-Hesseiny and Fatma Refaat under the title Spring.

Hazem El-Mestikawy (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thur, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 April.

Fabrizio Clerici
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 14 April.
Oils, watercolours, mixed media and lithographs by a surrealist in the tradition of de Chirico.

Collective Exhibition (Calligraphy)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 16 April, exc 5-11 April.

Olmedo Quimbita
Cairo Opera House Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 18 April.
Paintings by the Ecuadorian artist.

Wahib Nassar (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 23 April.

Ahmed Badawy (Jewelery) & Ahmed Ragab Sakr (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 April.

Maja Fredriksson (Installations)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 April.

Jewellery Designs by Artists
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Until 25 April.
Silver and gold jewellery encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones designed by Italian painters and sculptors.

Christian de Portzampare (Architectonic Studies)
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 26 April.

Linda Cohn-Kobelecky (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 30 April.

Jack Kilby (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 7 May.
Works under the title Arab Jerusalem in the Shadows of the Noble Sanctuary.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Branch School Diary
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, Japanese Embassy, 106 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. 2 April, 6pm.
Directed by Isac Kumagaya (1978).

Il Gattopardo
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 5 April, 7pm.
Directed by Visconti (1963), with Burt Lancaster and Alain Delon.

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Relic
Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Air Force I
Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Addicted to Love
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Mr Bean
Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Two Much
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

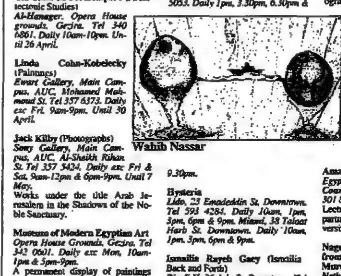
Fire Down Below
El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Face/Off
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Tomorrow Never Dies
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

Tamania wa Arba'in Sa'a Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.


Wahib Nassar

Hysteria
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

DANCE

Nora The Gypsy
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Until 12 April, 8pm.
A dance theatre performance by Diana Calenti.

MUSIC

Vardan Mamikonian
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 2 April, 9pm.
A piano concert performed by the talented and celebrated Armenian soloist, winner of the first prize at the Yvonne Lefebure Piano Competition in 1990 and first prize at the Monte Carlo Piano Masters' Competition.

Flute and Harp Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 2 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Boisvallée, Donizetti, Godefroid, Ravel, and others, performed by Wolfgang Lindenthal (flute) and Manal Mohieddin (harp).

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 2 & 5 April, 8pm.

Aquila Soloists
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 3 April, 9pm.
15 soloists perform works by Rossini, Aganini, Bottesini and Braga.

Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 3 April, 8pm.
Soloists Ratiba El-Hefni (soprano), Neveen Allouba (soprano), Manal Mohieddin (harp), Wolfgang Lindenthal (flute) and Mahmoud Osman (violin) perform works by Handel, Mozart, Vivaldi, Tosernati and Sherif Mohieddin, conducted by Richard Edlinger and Sherif Mohieddin.

Piano Recital
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 4 April, 9pm.

Conservatoire Youth Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 4 April, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 4 April, 8pm.
Mahler's Symphony no 6, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Mohamed El-Helbawy
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 6 April, 8pm.
Sufi music and songs.

THEATRE

Arabic One Act Plays
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. Until 31 March, 7pm.
Four Aleina Bokra (Pass By Us Tomorrow) and *Elli Ba'duh* (Next in Line), scripted by Mohamed Salmawy and directed by Injy Seih.

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Alabanda
Al-Fardous Theatre, Al-Berath Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

LECTURES

Laszlo Almasy — The Hungarian Explorer of the Sahara: His Life, Work and Scientific Acheivements
Egyptian Geographical Society, 109 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 354 5450. 2 April, 6pm.
Lecture by Professor Janos Kubassek, director of the Hungarian Geographical Museum, on the real man behind the character portrayed in *The English Patient*.

The Figures of Plautus and Terence
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 2 April, 7pm.
Moderated by Professor Ahmed Etman and will be followed by the projection of Cleopatra, directed by Mankiewicz.

Replicating Ancient Egyptian Glass Technology at Amarna
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. 2 April, 7pm.
Lecture by Paul Nicholson, department of archaeology of the University of Sheffield.

Naguib Mahfouz: Awlad Haretna from Censorship to Attempted Murder
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 2 April, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Raymond Stock, University of Pennsylvania.

Third International Leadership Conference
American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. Sessions will take place at the Oriental Hall, the VIP Lounge in Hill House (Main Campus) and the Blue Room (Greek Campus). For details, contact the AUC. Daily until 4 April, 9am-6pm.
Topics discussed are styles of leadership, negotiation and lobbying, crisis management, presentation and marketing skills.

Royal Mosaic Workshop in Ptolemaic Alexandria
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, 11 Al-Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 4 April, 6pm.
Lecture by Professor Wiktor A. Daszewski, former director of the PCMA and director of the Polish Archaeological Mission in Marina Al-Alamein.

Ancient Egyptian Wigs and Hairstyles
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, as above. 5 April, 7pm.
Lecture by Joann Fletcher, Egyptologist, Manchester University.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Theatre

Wild concoctions

Nehad Selaiha faces a clash of theatrical opposites

Assuming that you can make it across Tahrir Square without being run over (a feat that requires some acrobatic skills), the distance from Al-Hanager Centre to Gomhouria Theatre can be easily covered on foot in less than half an hour. And yet, last week, going from one to the other seemed, in terms of the theatrical experience you get at each, like crossing the Grand Canyon. It was as if both venues had secretly conspired to expose the Cairene audience to two irreconcilable extremes of theatre.

Raja Ben Ammar's Tunisian *Faust*, a strange and wild mixture of Goethe's opus and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* liberally laced with some of the songs Kurt Weil composed for Brecht's plays and one song by Um Kulthum, was aggressively, almost oppressively, physical. The moral — the deplorable position of women in the Arab world — was all too obvious. It boiled down basically to good old-fashioned sex and violence punctuated by generous flashes of Ben Ammar's lovely legs. Superimposing the unfortunate Blanche Du Bois upon the equally hapless Gretchen, with the shadow of Stella, Blanche' sister, occasionally glimpsed lurking in the background, Ben Ammar was alternately seduced (by Mephistopheles), beaten (by Faust), and raped (by both) with almost monotonous regularity. As passions ran wild and the four actors flung themselves about the stage and writhed on the floor, suddenly crackling flames leapt up as a real fire was ignited on stage. It was impressive, if painfully obvious; it also led to a half-hour delay on the opening night as the Hanager staff rushed around frantically in search of a gas regulator valve to prevent the theatre from providing what could have been the most spectacular fireworks display since the opening of the new Opera House, or, indeed, since the old one, which once stood in Opera Square, downtown, went up in flames in 1970, in full view of the fire department.

I could not understand why anyone needed a fire with Ben Ammar on stage! She gives off enough sparks and waves of heat as it is. And, indeed, as it turned out, not only the fire, but everything as well (including the many sound and visual effects and the complicated set which sported the hulk of a Volkswagen in one corner — Faust was German after all) proved superfluous. One had eyes only for Ben Ammar and she gave a riveting performance, at once fiercely passionate and technically brilliant. With a performance like this, who cares if the text and conception she worked out with *Almunsif Alsayem* (who played the brutal, wife-battering, wife-raping oriental Faust) were sometimes unbearably clumsy or downright vulgar?

In contrast to the overwhelming sensuality and sensational brutality of the Tunisian *Faust*, the French ALIS company production *100 Mobiles a Part 1* (which pronounced in different ways could mean, among other things, one hundred motives minus one, or without apparent motive, or one hundred moving objects, or repeating the word 'bile' one hundred times starting at one) fanatically shunned the human body and was blissfully, or sadly, depending on your taste, completely devoid of passion. Indeed, as Pierre Furny and Dominique Soria, austerely clad in black, and moving softly and sedately like two monks, went on moving or, rather, choreographing their various gigantic shapes and objects (needles, mineral water bottles, crescents, two swallows, cubes, a pair of binoculars, among other things) around the stage to create intriguing visual formations, occasionally accompanied by slide projections, the temperature inside the Gomhouria auditorium kept dropping until it became positively chilly.

I cannot pretend to have enjoyed *100 Mobiles* despite its many visual surprises and occasional stunning images. It was too cerebral for my taste, even in its humorous play on words, of which there was plenty. Except for one or two brief moments, it failed to achieve the kind of poetry and pathos that made the company's earlier production, *Catalogue d'un bonheur sans histoire*, such a favourite with the audience, the members of the international jury, and the Egyptian critics during the 1992 Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre. That year, ALIS won the award for best technique, which in fact means best scenography. I suppose they can win it again this year with their *100 Mobiles*; but the fact remains that there was much more to *Catalogue d'un bonheur* than mere technique.

Most actors, predictably, hate the kind of theatre Fourny and his crew (mainly Dominique Soria and Christophe Goncalves) make and even refuse to consider it as theatre. In 1992, one actress walked out of the theatre in disgust during the performance of *Catalogue*, and another described him as a trickster, a conjurer, a puppeteer and the deadliest threat to the acting profession. Fourny would have told her, perhaps, that rather than banish the actors off the boards he wanted to transform them into makers and creators. Would she have believed him? I wonder what Raja Ben Ammar would say.

Around the galleries


Mona El-Beely

THREE women exhibit their paintings at the Atelier. Those by **Mona Ismael** are abstract treatments of landscapes where brushstroke is all. **Mona El-Beely** exhibits portraits, more like drawings than paintings, while the abstract works by **Magda Abu El-Futuh** incorporate a variety of materials including sand and dried plants.

Jewelery by **Ahmed Badawi** is on display at Extra Gallery. The fish and birds wrought in silver and gold, studded with emeralds, turquoise and lapis lazuli, are more Miroesque than Yeatsian — stylised but not lavish.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Defrosting the mermaid



Khairiya El-Bishlawi examines the sometimes over-rich brew presented at this year's Cairo International Film Festival for Children

The Eighth Cairo International Film Festival for Children (25-31 March) was the first to be held after the passing away of its founder, Saadeddin Wahba. This year's festival was chaired by film critic Samir Farid, who made the rather disconcerting statement in the festival's bulletin that "the festival does not address itself to children, but targets those working in the field of cinema, just like any other international film festival."

This statement is in flagrant contradiction with one of the aims in the charter of the event, which describes it as an educational occasion for children. Furthermore, this statement, if taken verbatim, would mean that the huge amount of state funding invested in the festival is in fact wasted money, especially given that the event has yielded hardly any profit in the past.

This year, Egypt participated with a very naive film by a young director, Shadi El-Fakharani, entitled *Boss Maa' Elli Ganbak* (Look Together). The film tackles the story of a poor child in the cruel world of school. Other Egyptian films screened at the festival included Mustafa Wahid's *Fariq Al-Inqaz* (Rescue Team) and Essam Heshmat's *Hamada Qalb Al-Assad* (Hamada the Lionheart), the latter being a short documentary on a little boy, Hamada, who inhabits the dangerous world of the circus. There was also the animated television film *Al-Mataha* (The Maze) and the documentary *Ahlam fil-Alali* (High Falutin' Dreams) by Ali El-Ghazouli, who ranks among Egypt's and the Arab world's best documentary film-makers.

The paucity of Egyptian films is in stark contrast to the many glossy pamphlets produced by the festival, pamphlets that deal with various sociological, educational and even environmental aspects of films for children. The dearth of Egyptian films for children is underscored by the fact that the opening film of previous festivals was usually a Walt Disney one, the only Arab opening film in past rounds being Dureid Lahham's *Kafroun*. As for this year, the opening film was — in keeping with the "Egypt-France: Shared Horizons" festivities — French. This was *Microcosmos*, an excellent documentary about the natural world showing the life cycles of minute insects and their will to survive in a humanising, fascinating manner. Indeed, at the end of the film, the names of the various insects appear in the credits.

In direct contrast is the choice of the closing film: *Al-Ganeb Al-Akhar Min Al-Nahr* (The Other Side of the River) by the Moroccan director Mohamed El-Abbazi. Made in 1982, this is El-Abbazi's only film; but then, perhaps, it is being screened as a compliment to the Arab component of a festival which, this year, has a jury headed by famous Algerian director, Mohamed Al-Akhdar Hamina, the only Arab winner of Cannes' Palme D'Or.

As for the Arab films showing in this year's festival, they were unconvincing, not to mention unexciting. Jordan participated with Ihab Al-Khatib's documentary *Tofoula Maslouba* (Confiscated Childhood), while Tunisia offered up a short feature by Al-Monsef Al-Kateb entitled *Al-Qandil* (The Lamp). Saudi Arabia participated with the short feature *Al-Saher Al-Aguib* (The Astonishing Magician), Qatar with the long feature *Al-Rahhala* (The Traveller), Kuwait with *Anti Taleqa* (I Divorce You), Sudan with *Al-Nil* (The Nile), Lebanon with *Zata Marra* (Once Upon a Time) and Syria with *Arsom Holmi* (I Draw My Dream).

Among the best films screened at the festival was Iranian director Mohamed Ali Talebi's *Bag of Rice*, co-produced with Japan. This film is a case study of what films for children should be. Through the heroine, a little girl who played her role beautifully, the film explores, without ever lapsing into pedantry, a number of moral values such as cooperation between people, respect for the elderly and compassion towards children. Another very noteworthy film was *The Little Cat* by the Russian director Ivan Bobov. This film charts the adventures of a kitten in a big city and is full of lyricism and highly developed cinematography that does not draw attention to itself.

On the other hand, there were quite a few films that were too sophisticated for the target viewer whose age ranges between four and 14. Among these must be included Hungarian director Laszlo Doboky's film, *The Piano Concerto*, which leaves the viewer uncertain of the significance of breaking down the piano into a number of mobile machines that crash into each other on the screen. The Ukrainian film *The Last Kiss* also falls in this category. It shows a day in the life of a lonely man in a village who drags a beautiful mermaid out of a frozen lake, tries to resuscitate her with the intention of forming a relationship but, alas, in vain.







Clockwise from top: two stills from the Moroccan film *Al-Ganeb Al-Akhar Min Al-Nahr* and *Wild America*

Pictures and words

Amina Rachid reviews the proceedings of an international conference addressing the relationship between literature and the arts

For three days, from 23 to 26 March, an international conference on "Literature and the Arts" was held under the auspices of Cairo University's French Department. Apart from Egyptian conferees from the local universities, the conference brought various speakers from the French-speaking world, among them Guy Borrelli from the University of Nancy and Antoine Raybaud from the University of Geneva.

The speakers in the first session, dedicated to the theoretical and historical framework of the conference, included Antoine Raybaud, Nadia Andarawoss, Ghada Ghatwari and Farida El-Nagdi. This session traced the development of the relationship between literature and the arts going back to ancient cultures like the Egyptian and Chinese where the letter was a picture and the picture stood for a concept, via the Renaissance and German Romanticism, and its formulations of the relationship between spirit and rationality and thought and imagination in the quest for harmonising various forms of expression.

The relationship between literature and the arts, according to the early modernist French poets Baudelaire and Mallarmé, was discussed. Baudelaire's modernity is defined by the immortality of beauty and the temporary consciousness of the passing minute, with all the emotion and synthesis of the senses that it entails, and Mallarmé's combines the dancing woman and the rhythm of poetry.

The second plenary session brought Randa Sabri, Guy Borrelli, Salma Mobarak and Salwa Lotfi in a discussion of the image in literary works and literature in cinema. The question posed here is how imagery in narrative can project the local to the furthest parameters of what is said and what is unspoken in narrative and how cinema, in reproducing the literary text, crystallises a different vision of it through the audiovisual medium.

In the third plenary session, Leila Enan, Maha Gad El-Haq and Ebtehal Younis discussed the image and the possibility of its interpretation in the plastic arts and in drawings that accompany a written text. In this latter context, the papers and discussions brought out the use to which portraits and images are put in the propagation of a given ideology which is generally the hegemonic one. This was illustrated by the orientalist significations of portraits and images accompanying the *Description de l'Egypte*.

The last plenary session was attended by speakers Juzine Gawdat, Aziza Said, Salwa Matar, Asma' Amer, and Yasmin Sarwat. Here, the discussion focused on the two-fold relationship between poetry and the plastic arts, specifically as seen in the cases of the poet/artist and the poet/friend of artists and the poet who is a contemporary of a given artistic school. Debate centred around the traditional linguistics of the Swiss School and the dialogics of Bakhtin.

The conference ended with a final session of testimonies given by Egyptian artists and writers whose work was affected by both the word and the image. These included Edwar El-Kharrat, Adli Rizkallah and Ezz El-Din Naguib.

The conference yielded a number of recommendations. These included a call to critics, writers, artists and researchers to go beyond traditional formulations that see the arts and literature as separate discrete entities and to attend to the intimate, profound relationships that link the various means of expression and fields of knowledge. The suggestion was also made that an annual conference on the same model, but including a larger number of languages, should be held. The proposal was also made that a conference hall, that would also function as a space for dramatic performances and screening of films, should be constructed in the new Faculty of Arts building. Emphasis should be placed, the conferees agreed, on the teaching of all subjects pertaining to the plastic arts, cinema and music in the various humanities departments of faculties of arts at all stages of education.

Books

Letters and other memorabilia

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews some of the more interesting titles to have appeared in the past month

***Yawmiyat Zabit Fil-Aryaf* (Diaries of an Officer in the Countryside), Hamdi El-Batran. Cairo: Dar El-Hilal, 1998**

The novel "Diaries of an Officer in the Countryside" derives part of its importance from the fact that its author is an officer working in Upper Egypt which lends the force of an eye-witness account to his narrative on police practices in dealing with terrorists.

El-Batran's writing is free of rhetorical flourishes and showy techniques, and bears instead the hallmarks of simplicity and truthfulness. In any case, the reality he describes — police stations, crime, fundamentalism, and officers in distant villages — is so patently interesting as to carry the day.

***Tuqous Al-'Aza'a* (Rituals of Condolence), Khaled El-Gouweili. Cairo: Silsilat Shifah Ariya, 1998**

This first collection of short-stories by Khaled El-Gouweili has long been in the pipeline. Some of the stories in the volume were first published almost 30 years ago. El-Gouweili has been weaving in and out of various art forms, among them photography, writing for the theatre and short-story writing. As the publisher has written on the back cover of the book, "these are realist works, but then reality here is haunted by its ghosts, its alternatives."

***Binaa Dawla; Dawr Al-Musaadat Al-Kharigiya Li-Israil* (The Building of a State: the Role of External Support for/to Israel), Ahmed El-Sayed El-Naggar. Cairo: Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, 1998**

The mere fact that external funding to Israel from 1948 to 1996 came to 179.4 billion dollars is very telling. After subtracting direct and indirect investments from that figure, the financial support for the same period comes to 156 billion dollars — the buying power/value of which is the equivalent of 450 billion dollars at 1996 values, most of which was in the form of non-refundable donations.

The author, economist Ahmed El-Sayed El-Naggar, studied the sources, flow and distribution of these foreign funds as well as their role in shaping the future of Israel.

***Al-A'maal Al-Kamila Li-Mikhail Roman, Al-Guze' Al-Awal* (The Complete Works of Mikhail Roman, vol I). Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1998**

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the death of playwright Mikhail Roman (1922-1973) who, through his short life and career, left a significant legacy to Egyptian theatre.

It was particularly in the 1960s that Roman made his mark, presenting Cairene theatres with a number of plays that presaged the 1967 defeat. After the defeat, Roman wrote a number of texts that upheld the spirit of resistance, foremost among which is *Laylat Masraa Guevara Al-Azim* (The Night of the Assassination of the Great Che Guevara).

GEBO's initiative to revive the legacy of Roman by reprinting his texts in its Complete Works Series, headed by Farouk Abdel-Wahab, is indeed welcome. This first volume includes his play *Al-Dukhan* (Smoke), first published in 1968, the previously unpublished *Al-Hisar* (Siege) which was performed once in 1965 and *Azizi Ragab* (My Dear Ragab), which has been neither published nor performed before.

***Bonaparte Wal-Islam; Bonaparte Wal-Dawla Al-Yahoudia* (Bonaparte and Islam, Bonaparte and the Jewish State), Henry Lawrence, tr Bashir El-Sebai. Cairo: Dar Masr Al-Arabiya, 1998**

A translation of two texts by French historian Henry Lawrence, the publication of this book could not have had a more propitious timing, given the raging debate that surrounds the bi-centennial celebration of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt.

The first text was originally a lecture, entitled "Bonaparte and Islam", read by the French historian at the French Cultural Centre in Cairo in 1997. Here, Lawrence expands on some of the aspects tackled in his book *The French Expedition in Egypt*, in addition to an appendix containing a translation of an Arab story, entitled "The Prophet's Mask", that Bonaparte had transcribed.

The second text, "Bonaparte and the Jewish State", is a study of the project of a Jewish State in Palestine which has been ascribed to Bonaparte, in addition to a note by the translator about Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's treatment of this subject in his *Secret Negotiations Between Arabs and Israel*.

***Dawair Min-Hanin* (Cycles of Nostalgia), Said El-Kafrawi. Morocco: Dar Tubqal, 1998**

This, the seventh collection of short-stories by Said El-Kafrawi, comprises 25 texts grouped under the rubrics: "A Villager's Nostalgia", "Painful Nostalgia", "Nostalgia for Astonishment", "Nostalgia for Water" and "Final Nostalgia".

***Gabal Wa Bahr Wa Warda* (Mountain, Sea and Flower), Amal El-Mirghani. Cairo: Kitab El-Garad, 1998**

The present volume of short-stories, its author's first, is in keeping with El-Garad's policy of publishing new and experimental writers. The 14 short-stories in this collection were written between 1984 and 1997.

***Ayam El-Umr; Rasail Khassa Bayn Taha Hussein Wa Tawfik Al-Hakim* (A Lifetime: Correspondence Between Taha Hussein and Tawfik Al-Hakim), ed Ibrahim Abdel-Aziz. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1998**

The strong friendship between Taha Hussein and Tawfik Al-Hakim started in 1923 and ended with the death of the former in 1973. Between these two dates, much water, sometimes tranquil and sometimes turbulent, passed under the bridge of their friendship. The editor has collected letters that go back to the early 30s. Some of these reveal Hussein's admiration for El-Hakim's famous play *Ahl El-Kahf* (Cave Dwellers), as well as the two writers' opinions about the 1952 Revolution and their disagreements about the Language Academy. These exchanged missives between two key-figures in modern Egyptian culture are a true find.

Plain Talk

During my recent visit to the United States I had the opportunity of visiting the Dahesh Museum in New York. Situated on 6th Avenue, this is the only museum established by an Arab in America. Dr Dahesh was a Lebanese art collector and connoisseur, apart from being a philosopher and a writer with over 40 titles to his name. He has a large group of followers, both Arab and American.

But the talk about Dr Dahesh is not my concern here, since this requires an article by itself. In the museum I met Dr Flore Edouwaye S. Kaplan, professor of anthropology and museum studies at New York University. Together with the Dahesh Museum, professor Kaplan is organising a symposium, starting on 4 May, entitled "Guardians of Monuments and Memory: Case Studies in Urban Conservation and Museums in the Middle East". The Middle Eastern countries studied are Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, alongside a general discussion of Islamic art.

The symposium opening will be addressed by Dr Kaplan, professor Gilsenan, from the anthropology and Middle Eastern studies departments at New York University and the crown prince of Jordan. The case studies of Egypt will be presented by Dr Gawdat Gabra, former director of the Coptic Museum, and Dr Shawqi Mehani Nakhla, former director-general of restoration and conservation of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation. Dr Gaballa Ali Gaballa, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, will also address the symposium.

In a chat with Dr Kaplan, she explained the reasons behind the convocation of the symposium. Like urban centres everywhere, she said, the Middle East's landmarks are testaments to its dreams and achievements. Facing natural disasters, population growth, pollution, urbanisation and global tourism, they stand as embattled reminders of the scale of the challenge to preserve the world's cultural heritage. The Pyramids, the Sphinx, she continued, the great red city of Petra, the Topkapi Palace of the Ottoman sultans, rise between Europe and Asia. And in the surrounding city scapes and in the desert lie thousands upon thousands of monuments and ancient sites.

The symposium celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Museum Studies programme, graduate school of Arts and Science, at New York University, which is the largest and best known of its kind in the world. Its 500 international graduates are working in cities, towns and sites around the globe in museums, historical and archaeological centres, and in the interpretation and conservation of cultural property.

I was anxious to know more about what has come to be called musology, or museum studies, which is the topic of the project of which Dr Kaplan is director. It is, she said, to train students in the work of museums. Museums are not simply places for the display of objects, but also a means of raising the cultural standards of the people. Museum workers, be they curators or assistants, are special museum teachers. In fact, museums should forge close links with education. In some countries, like the US, Britain and Denmark, museum visits are part of the school curriculum.

When the students go to a museum, it is not only for entertainment or a quick tour of the different departments. They hold, Dr Kaplan said, a silent dialogue with the objects displayed. It is education through visual means.

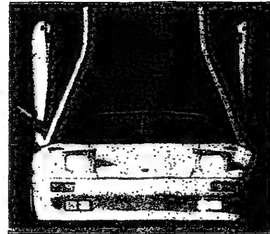
The courses in Dr Kaplan's project deal with all aspects of the museum, from administration, display, selection, maintenance and technical issues to educational methods. One important thing which the programme tries to do is to create in the students a real liking for the objects. They must learn how to enjoy looking at them and feel a continuous urge to learn more about them.

The symposium is important, says Dr Kaplan. But what is more important is to raise enough funds to enable young people from the Middle East to come and join the programme. In this way, she says, we could have museum specialists, which we badly need. I cannot agree with her more.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Dreams on wheels





This week, Automech '98 gave Egyptians a chance to check out the latest models from their favourite manufacturers. **Peter Snowdon** went looking for a lean machine — and fell for something altogether more substantial

Like everyone else, I went to Automech '98 in search of the car of my dreams. On entering the hall, the first sign I saw read: "Egyptian Abrasives". Perhaps I'd come to the wrong place? I was looking for something long, smooth and powerful — or so I thought. Maybe I'd have to think again.

Of course, if Egypt were to have a natural monopoly, why shouldn't it be sandpaper? The young man standing next to the beach buggy just couldn't see it that way. "There aren't many people here who are interested in recreational desert accessories," he confided. Odd, when you consider how much recreational desert there is. "Yeah," he agreed, "but they all want to buy a Lamborghini. God knows why: they don't have the roads for it."

Perhaps that's why in Mansouriya and along the Ismaliya Road, *you can see parents* collecting their children from school in a Hummer. If a beach buggy is basically a lot of plastic garden furniture that has been left out in the sun to melt, a Hummer is a nuclear bunker on wheels — the family car that thinks it's a tank. The promotional video shows it climbing up cliff faces, shinnying along rock gullies, hauling men (though not many women) into places most of them, left to themselves, would never have gone. It looks so solid, you feel the landscape should gird up its loins and go crawling over the Hummer, while it just sits there, impassive, imperious. You can use it as a derrick digger or a concrete pumper. It's ideal if you want to turn the back garden of your villa into a heavy-industry theme park. It's very popular with safari organisers and oil companies. And with the Egyptian Army. And since one version can seat up to 18, you could not just bring your own children home in the evening, you could frog march the whole class into the back, lock the doors and drive them round the Eastern Desert for two or three hours until you *were sure they'd finished their homework.*

Some of the exhibitors seemed a bit daunted by having been given stands next to such an impressive outcrop of the military-industrial complex. Kia had brought their own DJ. Hyundai had a faux-geisha in a kimono beating hell out of a *shamisen*, while General Motors had hired two very long-legged young women to loiter in short skirts under the rotating lights, like hostesses in some unfashionable nightclub. But no one wanted to buy their cars. No one even asked them for a dance.

In the next hall, it was all more formal, and *somehow more "refined"* — though just as fetishistic. No women in short skirts: just men in funny tunics and fur hats that came down over their noses. The British government had graciously provided a small contingent of Welsh Guards to take up position around the Jaguar paddock as if they were protecting Buckingham Palace. "Will they talk to you?" a young boy asked me. "Excuse me," I said to the nearest guard. His nose wrinkled, imperceptibly. A sergeant appeared, trumpets blew, legs marched. The Jags rotated on their stands, sub*tly lit from within, like priceless porcelain vases.* On the other side of the hall, a disgruntled competitor opened up a twelve-cylinder engine and let it roar. For the first time since I'd arrived, there were cars to listen to, and not just music.

The car is a creature of paradox. The supreme emblem of urban-industrial civilisation, it exists only to destroy space, to "eat up miles", pollute the earth and tear communities apart. Yet just as car users band together in spurious brotherhoods, ranging from the petit bourgeois camaraderie-in-anxiety of the AA and the RAC, to the masonic sect-like activities of the more exclusive fan clubs, so the manufacturers weave a whole symbolic world around their machines, desperately laying claim to be part of nature — as if they realised, in their hearts, what a car really is: an *inferior version of an animal.*

Thus Alaa Tarraf, sales specialist with Ferrari Egypt, told me, "The symbol of Ferrari is a horse. But it's not just any horse. It's like an old Egyptian horse, with whom you can do many complicated dressage manoeuvres. That's what we mean when we say it has su*perior performance." Haiba Bin Zarai, mar*keting manager with GMC International, Egyptian agents for Lamborghini, goes one better: "If you want to describe Lamborghini, you have to look at our logo, which is a bull. Ferrucio Lamborghini took the bull as his symbol, because it was his astrological sign." But the bull is also a symbol of Lamborghini's roots in the rich farmland of the Po Valley. "He founded the company," explains Bin Zarai, "because although he was very wealthy, he couldn't buy an expensive sports car, because he came from an agricultural background: when he went to the showroom, they wouldn't sell to him, because he didn't look right."

Some of the visitors on opening night must have known how Lamborghini felt. Being "by invitation only", all the world and his baoab were there. The expressions on their faces may have differed — delight, envy, resignation, or total impassivity. But shows such as this are great levellers. They allow the very poor and the moderately rich to commune in various shades of the same feeling: impotence.

The class difference between Ferrari and Lamborghini persists in the cars' designs even to this day. The Ferrari is simple, elegant, stylish without pretension, the epitome of charm, of a self-confidence so inbred it verges on the effeminate, in the way of old money. The Lamborghini, on the other hand, is a thick-set, determined, even awkward-looking beast, like its self-made owner. I'd date the Ferrari — *but I'd hire the Lamborghini* as a bodyguard. Both are impressive feats of engineering, but neither of them could really be described as beautiful. After a while the Lamborghini, all hunched up and muscle-bound, all hips and no waist, looks more like a rat on steroids than a charging bull. The Ferrari, for its part, is just too flat and too low to dance like a horse — instead, you keep expecting it to sidle up to you, like a crab. And the leather is clearly tanned: Gucci with claws.

In the end, though, it's not the looks that matter. As Tarraf says, "You're not selling a car, you're selling a lifestyle." Bin Zarai, flexible in her geography, *concurs: "It's the* American Dream."

In fact, what you're buying, more than anything else, is a price tag. After I'd had my fill of Formula 1 gearboxes and adjustable suspensions, I went outside onto the forecourt, and there I had a vision. Head down, bonnet up, like some great ox slaking its thirst at the riverside, or a proud warrior with his visor cocked, surveying the field after battle, stood the vehicle of my dreams. Its name? The ZIL 13305 tractor truck. Its maximum speed is only 120 km/h, compared to over 300 for the swanky Italians inside. But it can haul 26 tons, whereas if you tried to hitch a caravan to the back of a Ferrari, the poor thing would probably have hysterics. ZIL are selling a lifestyle too: one of hard work, collective endeavour, and monumental achievement. ZIL were there when they built the High Dam. They're still there wherever they build anything in Egypt. They make no bones about being a machine. They don't try and pass themselves off as a plant or a bird or a stick insect. The Z even stands for "industrial", in Russian. Like everyone else, they had a video monitor, but instead of MTV, it seemed to be playing a documentary about labour disputes of the late 1970s.

Maybe I'm just nostalgic. After all, my first girlfriend used to come and pick me up in her father's truck. But with ZIL, at least, you're not just buying an image, you're buying a myth. And it's cheap at the price: LE125,000 to the end-user. That's approximately a quarter of the pre-tax cost of a Ferrari, or one-seventh of what you'd have to shell out for the Lamborghini. I know which one I'd rather have. I asked Ibrahim Mansour, service manager for ZIL's Egyptian agents, Al-Thulathiya Motors, what his preference was. He laughed. "They both have their uses, you know," he replied: "If I want to make money, I'd buy a ZIL. If I want to spend money, I'd buy a Ferrari!"



A family matter

"I have to tell you this, Eida my sister: Karima is a bad girl, she is going to bring shame upon the whole family." Hamda rolls her eyes, pretends to beat her breast, then fans herself with both hands. "Listen, there is this neighbour of ours, you know, he is a taxi driver, well, he came up to me the other day and said, 'I saw your husband's sister's daughter walking in the street after sunset with a young man.' I told him at once it wasn't her, that he was a silly old fool and had no business following girls when he was a married man with three grown children. 'She is like your daughter,' I shouted, 'and God will punish you for saying bad things about people's daughters.' But I knew it was her, the old man really saw her, and he knew that I knew, and what are we going to do now, tell me that?"

Hamda purses her lips and moves them quickly from side to side, then fans herself with the hem of her dress, rocking on her heels. "I told the man that God creates the same image a thousand times and that the girl he saw was not ours, but he said, 'she is your husband's sister's daughter, the one who does not see well and peers at you like this'." Hamda mimics peering, lifting her head up high and contracting her eyelids. "You and I know, my sister, that Karima looks like that. 'She was wearing tight trousers and a large shirt like a man's, and the fellow had a flat-top haircut,' he said; 'I followed them. I know her. I was at her sister's engagement and I saw her dancing that day.' Do you get my meaning? Karima danced that day, of course she did, is there an occasion on which Karima does not dance? She has no head, that girl, but what can I do? She is family."

Hamda nudges Eida. "Say something. When Sayed finds out, he is going to beat Karima and her mother so bad they will spend three months in bed. Remember when *Sayed beat me because I burned the food? I could not go* to work for a week. When I went back the woman complained about the dust under the bed and I still couldn't bend to sweep. I told her I fell off the bus. She believed me. What do these people know? But she swept under the bed herself." Hamda shakes her head. "I am warning you not to tell Sayed about his sister's daughter, because you know his temper, when he is angry he does not know his own mother, he will kill them. Be careful the words don't come out of your mouth. I wonder who he is... A flat-top haircut... Look at the girl!" Hamda sucks her teeth. "Maybe he has money... Karima likes money, that devil, but he will not marry her when he finds out that we clean people's houses... I bet she told him she works at the super*market... I say the same, and Karima's mother says she* works in a hospital..." Hamda sighs.

"I had to warn Samira, she is my husband's sister, they are family. Are you with me? I went to see Samira and, as soon as I walked in, I asked her, 'where are your daughters, Samira, the sun has gone down, and you are still cleaning your house; why aren't your daughters here to help you? Samira had nothing to say, you know she is slow, like this." Hamda puts her arms in a parenthesis around her hips, indicating fatness, and inflates her cheeks. "Karima was still at work, she said, but I told her it was almost six, and maybe even eight — I don't read the time but I know when it is late. 'I left work a long time ago,' I told Samira, 'I even had time to buy the vegetables, so why aren't your daughters home?' Just as I was talking, her daughters came in, and Samira pushed them into the bedroom, but I saw that Karima the devil had make-up on; and would you believe, all this time Samira did not give me a glass of tea or order her good-for-nothing daughters to make tea for their aunt, so I left and went to see my sister Kifaya, you know her, they call her *Umm* Mohamed but her name is Kifaya, because she is the youngest and the tenth daughter and our mother said *kifaya* [enough] when she was born."

Hamda nudges Eida and giggles. "Imagine? Kifaya already knew about Karima, because the woman had complained that Karima was stealing and Karima left work. 'She is going to make us wear bracelets yet, this girl,' Kifaya said, and I asked *if Karima had stolen bracelets, but* Kifaya told me to stop pretending to be stupid, she said she was talking about handcuffs, because she had found Karima this job and the woman could have sent the police after the whole family. I laughed when I thought of Kifaya like this," and Hamda holds her wrists together as if handcuffed. "'You have to tell me where you are going to go, Kifaya,' I told her, 'so we can come and bring you bread and *halawa*; will it be the Qanater prison or Torah?' 'I don't get to choose,' she said, that's what she said, Kifaya is always so funny, I laughed so hard I almost choked, but she said I ought to tell Sayed so that he beats up his sister's daughter and teaches her manners, because she is disgracing the whole family. I don't know. This is women's business: *when men get involved, it is* always bad for everyone."

Fayza Hassan

Temple of learning

The German Evangelical School in Cairo is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. Since its establishment under the Khedive Ismail, writes **Fayza Hassan**, the school has left its particular mark on generations of Egyptians and foreign students

Many foreign communities were already firmly implanted in Egypt during the second half of the 19th century, when the Germans turned toward the Orient, led by a new interest in the nature and history of other societies and the study of their written records and artefacts. German scholars developed a par*ticular interest in the religion and culture of* Islam, and joined the apostolic troops of French missionaries, teachers and scholars who settled in Egypt periodically.

During the same time, the digging of the Suez Canal created a flurry of banking and commercial activities in the area, in which the French and the British enjoyed the lion's share, but to which German and Swiss bankers and merchants did not remain indifferent.

In 1864, the German and Swiss communities formally established the Protestant Evangelical Church in Egypt, on land donated by the Khedive Ismail upon the request of the Prussian consul. The land was situated in what is now the centre of Cairo: 2,000 metres bordered by Al-Madabegh, Maghrabi, Emadeddin and Al-Manakh streets. The cornerstone of the church was laid by the heir to the Prussian throne, who was in Egypt for the festivities surrounding the opening of the Suez Canal. The building itself was financed by donations from Emperor Wilhelm I, the famous industrialist Frederich Krupp, German *donors and, finally, the khedive himself.*

The idea of attaching a school to the church came almost naturally, and the Higher Council of Evangelical Churches in Berlin readily agreed to send a pastor for the new church who would act as director of the school at the same time. The construction works were thus extended to include the school and the pastor's house in 1871, financed in the same way as the church, through donations, mainly contributed by the emperor. The rest of the necessary funds was gathered through the sale of part of the land donated by the khedive.

The school was moved to Bulaq in 1909, and was established on premises which Al-Ahram occupies today, then, after a brief hiatus during the war, it was reopened in 1953, in first one then a second villa in Zamalek. In the '70s, it moved to the extensive grounds on Dokki Street which it occupies today, and which accommodate well over 1,000 students.

In 1872, Bismarck issued a decree placing all *German schools under the direct super*vision of the state and, when the first pastor of the Evangelical Church in Egypt expressed the intention of running the school as a religious institution, he was strongly opposed by the German consul, who wished the school to remain secular, as did the rest of the community. The first board of directors was therefore established on this basis, and included the German consul, the pastor and director of the school, and prominent members of the German and Swiss communities.

The German School opened its doors in 1873 to its first 15 students. It was soon discovered that the tuition fees of the German and Swiss pupils would not cover the expenses of the school, and enrolment was therefore extended to Egyptians and foreign communities established in Egypt. Two classes for girls were included in 1901.

French being the language used in academic establishments of Egypt at the time, the German school at first followed suit, but, with the increase in the size of the German-*speaking community, the pressure to intro*duce and develop the teaching of German as the first language increased. The problem was not resolved, however, until well into the the next century, and French remained the language of instruction for decades.

This conflict may well have been at the root of the unique curriculum later developed by the school, in which the teaching of foreign languages played such an important role. After the 9th grade, explains the school's director, Sigurd von Boetticher, the students must choose between German and Arabic curricula, passing the *Habituer* or the *Thanawiya Amma* for their final exams.

Source: *125 Years of DEO Yearbook* (published by Max Group, 1998).

Sufra Dayma

Broccoli and cauliflower salad

Ingredients:
250g broccoli
250g cauliflower
1/3 cup slivered almonds
1/4 cup Italian dressing
1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice

Method:
Cut the broccoli and cauliflower into florets. Place in a large pan of boiling water. Stand for one minute, then drain and plunge into iced water. Drain well. Preheat oven to moderate (180°C). Spread almonds on a foil-covered oven tray and place in oven for five minutes or until golden. Remove from tray to cool. Place dressing and lemon juice in a small screw-top jar and shake well. Place vegetables in a serving bowl. Pour over dressing. Sprinkle toasted almonds on top. Serve immediately.

To make this salad ahead of time, cook the vegetables and refrigerate until required. Bring to room temperature and add toasted almonds just before serving.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Clone zone

Andrew Steele experiences déjà-vu

Variety, they say, is the spice of life. Unless you run a restaurant chain, that is. The middle-range Swiss Restaurants in Cairo obviously have designs on Howard Johnson's if the bills of fare at La Chesa and Le Chantilly are anything to go by. Uniform to *a tee, and some.* The Adli Street space that La Chesa occupies is a little wonder of downtown ingenuity. The squared off U-shape has two doors and a pharmacy separates. The décor is very neo-Swiss, accentuated by prints and pics of Swiss people doing all things Swiss. Very clean, very Alpine, and, dare one say it, very cheesy. We were greeted and seated with the utmost courtesy. The waiting staff were eager as beavers and the service was impeccable.

The menus, as I have hinted, were identical twins to those that dwell in the Heliopolis branch, right down to the Coptic fasting specials and the selection of beignets and strudels. What it lacks is the glorious garden of its counterpart, with its fresh Heliopolitan air that fair fuels the appetite.

Forgoing starters for apéritifs, we plunged straight into the delights of the main course, choosing two items from the regular menu and two from the supplement.

The *saucisse de veau* with an onion sauce was good value, coming in at under LE15 for a filling plate. The sausages were well herbed, if a little chewy, and the onion sauce was thick and fragrant.

The *medallions de boeuf à la Bordelaise* were deemed a little small for the LE34.50 that they set us back, but were certainly a choice cut, oozing charm and panache. Croquette potatoes and the ubiquitous sauté accompanied. The mixed dolmas from the fasting menu were a might dry, but this was made up for by the tasty rice stuffing that nestled alluringly inside the vegetables. Bell *peppers*, courgettes and aubergines vied for plate space with the tasty little leaves.

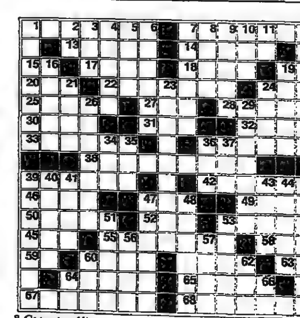
I'm afraid I am unable to pass comment on the Grandmother's Favourite — a strudel stuffed with vegetables and cheese with a creamy mushroom sauce. Why? Well, the strudel that graced our table was stuffed with turkey breast and spinach — I know not how it is referred to on the menu — but, despite this mishap, was perhaps the best of tonight's bunch. A rich cheese flavour had been cast upon the spinach, which, in turn, was topped with a moist and *toothsome slice of turkey breast.* The whole was wrapped in a layer of flaky filo pastry, and whilst calling it a strudel was stretching it a bit, I gobbled it down with marked enjoyment. Conclusions? A very "dinner" sort of restaurant, rather than the sort of place you would go for a snack and a drink, featuring a more adult set than the Chantilly. Dinner for four with four Stellas *came to LE110, but be warned, three of us* chose the cheapest choices on offer. When you're downtown and you yearn for that Swiss Restaurant experience, where else to go?

La Chesa, 21 Adli Street, Downtown
Tel: 3939360

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS
1. Free and easy; cordial (7)
7. Synonymous to a materialistic complacent businessman (7)
13. Concerned with (5)
14. Fall short; miscarry (5)
15. ...and behold (2)
17. Type of New Zealand and Australian fish (4)
18. Last portions of intestines (4)
19. You, Fr. (2)
20. Drinking vessel (3)
22. Deer's entrails (7)
24. Greek letter, pl. (3)
25. Short musical composition (5)
27. Corrida cheer (3)
28. Type of heron (5)
30. Famous fiddler (4)
31. Neither's partner (3)
32. Elderly debauchee (4)
33. Convictions; assurances (6)
36. Siberian grassy forested plain (6)
38. Type of smooth lustrous fabric (9)
39. Misrepresented (6)
42. Type of font (6)
46. On the sheltered side (4)
47. A legume (3)
49. Mauritius extinct flightless bird (4)
50. Stockpile (5)
52. Non-religious; poem; recline (3)
53. Wild canary (5)
54. Likely (3)
55. Obvious (7)
58. Slang appellation of medical person (3)
59. That is, abb. (2)
60. American Indian people living in Central Canada (4)
61. Comb. form for "air" (4)
63. Where Palestine, Egypt and Cyprus are, abb. (2)
64. Type of resin used in varnish-making (5)
65. Personal pronoun (5)
67. Humans (7)
68. Friendly understanding (7)

Last week's solution

DOWN
1. Affliction (7)
2. Musical note (2)
3. Rudiments of any subject (3)
4. Transported (5)
5. Hawaiian feast of roast-pig (4)
6. Derivation (6)
7. Person who takes charge of custody of prisoner (6)
8. Competent (4)
9. Capital of Idaho (5)
10. Part of lady's underwear (3)
11. Pronoun (2)
12. Guardian; fiduciary (7)
16. Peripheral; exterior (5)
19. Connection, hyph. Wds. (5)
21. Revered mentor (4)
23. Dunce; nincompoop (9)
24. Uphold (4)
26. Collection of information about a subject (7)
29. Explosive (7)
34. Definite article (3)
35. Broken-hearted (3)
36. Winter sport (3)
37. Blow for blow; a song bird (3)
39. Doctrine based on Babism emphasising religious unity and world peace (7)
40. Run off (5)
41. Open watercourse to a mill (4)
43. British nobleman (4)
44. Peculiarity of phraseology (5)
45. Acknowledge; be persuaded (7)
47. Pincers (6)
48. Lemur of Madagascar, hyph. Wds (6)
51. Lobster-skin (5)
53. Show off; parade (5)
56. Calf's flesh (4)
57. Inert gas (4)
60. Grimalkin or tabby (3)
62. Scandinavian money (3)
64. Initials of medical person (2)
66. Weather directions (2)

Two worlds apart

Field Marshal Tantawi, *minister of defence*, visited Germany and Italy last week. One of the topics on the agenda was the removal of the 18 million land-mines buried under the sands of Al-Alamein. Left there by British, German and Italian armies 55 years ago, the mines are still killing and maiming today. **Sahar El-Bahr** voyages to an arid land



photos: Gamal Said

Top row, left to right: Khamis Gomaa; Daoud Hassan Mishri; picking through a minefield. Bottom row: these live explosives are scattered across the desert of Al-Alamein, with only a few stones to mark the place where death lies

Almost every month, there is a report in the press of another horrific "accident": one more shepherd killed or maimed by a land-mine. "This one would have been fortunate if he had died instead of living a cripple. In any case, he won't be able to support his family," says Doma Bishri, one of the Bedouin of Al-Alamein. "Some of the Bedouin consider land-mines fate, a divine decree to which they resign themselves. Well, we do believe in God. But we also believe that God does everything for a reason. These mines are the responsibility of the countries that planted them. They are the real criminals. They refuse to discuss the issue or join in clearing up the land-mines. We are just the victims of someone else's war," says Bishri.

The town of Al-Alamein is centred around one short street, but the Commonwealth Cemetery and the museum attract thousands of tourists every year, commemorating their countrymen fallen in the war. A few miles away are the mine-fields, but no one visits those. Edgar Blume, a German tourist, visits the cemetery every year, but had never heard of the land-mines. "Every tourist visiting the city should donate even a small amount of money to the victims," suggests Blume.

In the past half century, about 500 people have died, and almost 6,000 have sustained injuries. Beneath the sand, the mines lie waiting.

For Ibrahim Muftah, head of the city council, the deaths and injuries are tragedies, of course: but he also laments the loss of 200,000 potentially profitable feddans, where tourist sites and petrol or wheat fields could bloom one day. For now, though, that garden of wealth grows only in the confines of his mind.

The Ministry of Agriculture cites annual rainfall and groundwater as evidence that agricultural projects would be viable here. Muftah adds that, despite the rare wildlife of the Marsa Matrouh area, "We can't be declared a natural protectorate. We can do nothing: no infrastructure, no utilities, no buildings," he sighs.

Egypt has the lion's share of this bitter crop: 20 per cent of the world's land-mines are here. In Al-Alamein alone, 200,000 hectares are thickly planted with 18 million mines.

In 1994, however, a UN report recorded only six thousand mines in Egypt. Only in 1995, a few hundred corpses later, did the UN and the world recognise that there are 23 million land mines in Egypt.

Clearing Al-Alamein, however, is not easy, explains Major General Magdi Qibissi, the head of the Military Engineering Department at the Ministry of Defence: flooding, rains and sand all move the mines, which means the area where they are buried is constantly expanding. Some of the areas where they are buried are covered in seas of sand dunes, making removal difficult and expensive. Furthermore, land-mines grow more sensitive and unpredictable with time.

To compound the problem, the countries that planted the mines in the deadly garden that is Al-Alamein have no accurate or complete maps for the land-mines. "The soldiers did not care: they just buried the mines at random and left," says Qibissi.

It costs only from $10 to $30 to bury a land-mine, but from $100 to $1,000 to remove it. The Ministry of Defence's ten-year clearing campaign, which lasted from 1981 to 1991 and resulted in the removal of about 12 million mines, cost $92 million. In 1996, the Ministry of Defence announced another plan, set to end in 2006, aimed at removing the remaining mines, "but this plan needs up-to-date assistance from the countries that planted them. Removing them is beyond the financial and technical capabilities of Egypt. We need laser equipment capable of detecting mines buried deep beneath the sand," asserts Qibissi.

Britain, which is responsible for the largest number of mines, donated half a million pounds sterling last year. Bishri said that an Italian group put up barbed wire and signs in the '50s, but these have long faded. Italy recently offered 20 Egyptian officers a three-week training course in mine-clearing. Germany had done nothing until Field Marshal Tantawi's visit there this week.

In Al-Alamein, the mines have not spared a single family. When Khamis Gomaa was 10, he lost one eye, two fingers and a herd of cattle — "which is worse, because we made a living from the herd." During those days, he remembers, accidents were more frequent. Five of his relatives died, and entire herds were decimated.

Time, experience and a grim process of trial and error have taught the Bedouin the locations and aspects of the mines. Children are taught what the mines look like, and their parents warn them not to pick things up from the ground. "We may live with the mines for decades," says Gomaa, "but they have left hardly a family intact. Our life is daily horror." When a child goes out with a herd and is late in returning, Gomaa adds, his mother starts screaming and crying, because she knows this can mean only one thing.

Last month, an engineer working in the nearby oil fields was driving through the desert when a land-mine exploded. He was saved somehow, although nothing remains of the car.

The compensation victims receive from the government has remained the same since the '50s: for an arm or a leg, LE120, and nothing for fingers — the most common injury. The families of those killed by mines can hope for LE25 a month — after protracted legal wrangling.

Dawoud Hassan Mishri remembers the war: at the beginning, the British evacuated the Bedouin from the desert, except for a few who worked in the camps. Hassan sold food to the British officers, and says they treated the Bedouin better than the Germans or Italians did.

After the war ended, the Bedouin made a living selling the spoils — wrecked tanks, cars, and guns — to iron and copper foundries. When this trove ran dry, some attempted to defuse mines and sell them for recycling. "This was suicidal: many failed and died," Hassan says.

Until today, the Bedouin still find tins and clothes belonging to long-gone British officers. Two months ago, Hassan found a belt and a copy of *Newsweek*, dated 1940, buried in the sand.

In 1994, the Bedouin found a 1912 Ford. They swear the car, which they gave to the museum, was still in working condition.

Hassan has eight children, four girls and four boys. Two of his sons work in the oil fields, the other two in Libya. None have been to school: What's the point? he asks. Hassan himself can talk politics as well as the next commentator, but school, he says, won't guarantee a job.

"Land-mines," concludes Bishri, "are the remains of cowardice: left behind for the innocents, for the culprits are long gone."

A house on the hill



The conflict between cultural preservation and archaeological protection in Al-Gourna is escalating rapidly. **Mariz Tadros** investigates

The west bank of Luxor has been shared by the Pharaohs' tombs and the people of Al-Gourna for over 200 years. Today, Al-Gourna is living through difficult times, to say the least. People are still shattered by "the second Luxor massacre", as the press called it, which took place on 17 January, when police forces attempted to carry out 16 demolition orders issued by the Luxor City Council. The orders were aimed at protecting the archaeological site near Hatshepsut's Temple from further encroachment by informal settlements. What the police did not expect was to be met with such vehement resistance by the inhabitants of Al-Gourna; the ensuing confrontation left four people dead and 29 injured.

The campaign to empty Al-Gourna of its human population has definitely been stepped up. The people of Al-Gourna don't know what to think or believe. Are they to be moved? How? When? Is relocation inevitable? Will it just be houses that will have to go? Or the shops, workshops and hotels too? If alternative houses are to be built, is it also possible to "relocate" a culture and a way of life? There are many rumours and theories, but nobody in Al-Gourna really knows what is going to happen.

Selmi Selim, the newly-appointed head of the Luxor City Council, indicated to *Al-Ahram Weekly* that people "have really made too much of a fuss": He insists the government must take an uncompromising stand where the preservation of heritage and history is concerned. "These areas [on the west bank of the Nile] contain a sixth of the world's treasures. They must be preserved. Just as you have environmentally protected areas, you also have historically protected areas. You can't afford to have this heritage wasted because of informal houses being built in an uncivilised manner, in an inhumane and unhealthy manner, on important historical areas. This is not acceptable," he stated firmly. Selim said that nine points in Al-Gourna are targeted for relocation: Madinat Habu, Qarnet Mar'i, Al-Hornbat, Al-Atiyyat, Al-Ghabat, Al-Sawalem, part of Al-Geneya, and the east bank.

If the preservation of archaeological sites is of the utmost national importance, why were the people of these areas not told to settle elsewhere 200 years ago, when they came to the land of Tiba? "Even if it is too late, the initial idea is that no house will be razed until a better alternative is provided, and so there is no problem. Just because we did not think of it a hundred years ago, this does not mean that we cannot start thinking for our future now. We are looking 20 years ahead," exclaims Selim.

There was talk of resettlement a decade ago, he says, but it was not possible then because the resources necessary were absent. "This is a national project and it requires millions of pounds." But even today, in the midst of implementation, the question of resources is still prominent. Last week a heated argument erupted in the People's Assembly at the Culture and Information Committee meeting. Selim pointed out that the project, which has cost LE310 million, must get underway before the cost doubles. But Essam Amin, from the Ministry of Planning, said that his ministry had estimated the cost of the project at around LE100 million.

The new location projected is Al-Taref, about one kilometre away from Al-Gourna. The resettlement project, Selim repeats, will be a "tremendous leap forward for the people" as it will provide them with infrastructure and services while preserving their way of life on a communal and cultural level. "So far, we have done the feasibility studies, the architectural planning, and land leveling. We have started basic infrastructure, which should be finished within two years. The government will then build 2,000 houses of the same size, but possibly even larger than those they have now, with the same architectural concept in mind, but on a much more modern basis," he says, full of enthusiasm over what he describes as the "cultural, civilisational and hygienic leap that the people will experience." The only difference between the old and the new locations, Selim reiterates, "is that these new houses will be cleaner, with services such as clean water, sewers, telephone lines and access to health and education."

The people of Al-Gourna, he believes, "are very happy about it, thrilled about this new move. Absolutely." Measures have been taken to ensure that people's livelihood will be secured, he affirms. "There will be workshops, technical training units, exhibition areas, a large parking lot, a market, a police station, a bank — it will look more like a shopping centre. The people are really happy about it."

The people of Al-Gourna, however, say they are confused, anxious and bitter. They are rather wary of Selim, they confide: he is from the north, after all, and this is his first post in Luxor. Undoubtedly, too, the fact that he issued the demolition orders shortly after being appointed head of the Luxor City Council is a point of contention. "How could we be happy about it, when it is the first time we hear about this shopping complex?" wonders Mohamed Ahmed, who owns a large alabaster workshop in Al-Gourna. His business was established in the 1970s but he can trace the history of his family in Al-Gourna back seven generations. Al-Gourna, he says, is home to hand-sculpted alabaster products. Elsewhere they are machine-made. Five full-time artisans in his employ continue to extract the alabaster the traditional way, from the heart of the mountain. Tourists drop by to see the artists at work and *Hajj* Ahmed boasts of regular clients who visit from all over the world. He is scared that relocation will mean death to his business. "They buy from here because the place has a special feel to it, like Khan Al-Khalili. I am worried that if our shops are relocated in a modern complex, the tourists will be put off," he explains.

Behind him is a large two-storey village house with animals painted on the white-washed wall. "This is my house, right next to my alabaster shop. If they want to tear it down, fine, but not my alabaster industry: how am I going to make a living?"

Ingrid Bogousted, a painter from Norway, has been coming to Al-Gourna for the past six years, and is fuming about the resettlement plans. "The idea that they are resettling this village for tourists' sake doesn't make sense. Do you think we come here just to see the monuments? People come for the distinct culture of Al-Gourna. They like to stroll around the colourful houses and the people. It would be a tragedy to take this all away."

Protecting the monuments of Al-Gourna is a sticky issue, however. Because the government has refused to install any infrastructure in the area (except electricity), fearing this might affect the tombs and sites underground, people took matters into their own hands in disposing of waste and in accessing water. On the other hand, the government has provided electricity, and people had metres installed in their homes. This step was interpreted by the inhabitants as a government stamp legitimising their presence in the area.

The government's general policy, however, is to freeze all new constructions in Al-Gourna. The inhabitants have reacted sceptically. One inhabitant says: "This is really about double standards. Look at that big house over there, with the garden. That belongs to the German archaeological team. They have been excavating here for years. The government dug a water pump underground to access water for them and they are right there in the middle of the monuments. Are they better than us?"

The issue is tricky because these same foreign archaeological teams working in Tiba often find their work brought to a halt because they reach a point where a house or two must be removed for them to continue excavating. In these cases, the Council gets involved.

The residents of Al-Gourna feel a strong affinity with the place, and even think of themselves as the guardians of Tiba's archeological treasures. Abdel-Salam Ahmed El-Sawalhi, in his seventies, has a million and one stories to tell of how he and the people of Al-Gourna used to protect the place from greedy archaeological inspectors who wanted to smuggle a piece or two out to sell to interested foreigners. "We, the people of the place, care about it most. When the fundamentalists in the Luxor massacre tried to escape, we chased them. If we go, you can guarantee there will be many thefts in this place."

El-Sawalhi, who has lived in Al-Gourna all his life, says they will have to shoot him before relocating him. Many made equally emotional statements. This may be because the residents don't believe that the area will be a protected open-air museum. They are convinced that, after resettlement, the government will make way to investors who will buy the land and start their own ventures there.

At the heart of the matter, perhaps, is that the people feel their lives will never be the same, and their culture destroyed forever. The City Council's promise that the new houses will be just as big as their own makes them laugh in disbelief. Those whose neighbours and family have settled at Al-Rawageh describe "miserable, tiny cubicles". Selim, however, told the *Weekly* that the houses at Al-Rawageh were built for the victims of the 1994 floods, not for resettlement.

Ragheb Maximos Abdel-Malak, 65, says he was approached by the government a year and a half ago. "They told me there are some empty houses left in Al-Rawageh and that they will give each family a house. I went to see the place and I refused." It wasn't just that the alternative accommodation was much smaller; it doesn't fulfil his family's needs. "For instance, there was no traditional oven so that we can make our own *shamsi* bread. Not all the houses were together. We have this big house with different rooms for each family. Our lives are very closely knit. At the end of the day, we close this big gate and all of us are in one house. This house has been home for our families for over 150 years."

Another dilemma with resettlement is that, while many strive to make a living off tourism, they do not have an urban lifestyle. Each house is self-sufficient, baking its own bread, making its own cheese, raising cattle, poultry and camels. Some families are predominantly engaged in agriculture.

While Abdel-Malak has refused to budge, however, others in Al-Gourna think the move is inevitable. Only a few remnants of the famous adobe architecture can be seen today. "I don't think people understand. These are not slums. Our houses are spacious, and built in the distinctive Al-Gourna style. We don't want telephone lines and shopping malls, we just want to preserve our way of life on our land," says Abdel-Malak.

The people of Al-Gourna are divided. Some only hope they will not be given claustrophobic cubicles like those built for the flood victims, while others remain adamant — no one will move them, and they will fight, no matter what. One sentiment shared by all, however, is that there is more at stake than mud-brick dwellings.







photos: Randa Shaath

For Ibtisam Abaza (above), blindness need not be a social or professional handicap. What is needed: more facilities for the blind, and, more importantly, integration: the sense, among decision-makers and citizens alike, that such amenities as special ramps or Braille textbooks are crucial prerequisites for a "normal" life

Meeting special needs?

The services available for the blind in Egypt are inadequate, but **Gihan Shahine** discovers that some are seeking a change

Ahmed Khater, a 28-year-old teaching assistant at Helwan's Faculty of Arts, English Department, has to pore over at least 70 books for his Masters' degree in linguistics and legal translation. He has to correct exams and assignments for the 20 classes he teaches at Helwan University. And he has a 100-page thesis to write, as well as some translation work that has to be finished up.

"We may be blind, but we can still do a lot for society," Khater says. "All we need is for society and the government to give us a bit more credit and care. We need more facilities, and more opportunities to show and develop our skills."

He may be blind, but there is no stopping Khater. He graduated from Ain Shams University's Faculty of Arts with honours, near the top of his class. Yet he was not appointed to the faculty's teaching staff — usually an almost automatic step. He applied for a position teaching English at Helwan University and, after negotiations regarding his eligibility for the job, he was finally hired, together with two other blind academics. Khater, however, has no intention of studying for a PhD in Egypt, "where educational facilities for the blind are not adequate to do research work."

Ahmed Khater is only one of many highly qualified and ambitious men and women, who happen to be blind and who need more chances and better educational facilities if they are to attain their goals. He is also among the very privileged few who received a higher, not to mention any, education.

According to the figures for 1996 released by the Central Agency for Mobilisation and Statistics, out of over two million disabled Egyptians, 12.5 per cent are blind. That is, modest estimates set the number at around 250,000 blind people in need of special care. If the percentage of disabled, however, rises from 2.06 million in 1996 to around 2.09 million in 2017, as more recent estimates suggest, 100,000 more blind people will need help.

Egypt has about 228 governmental and non-governmental institutions for the rehabilitation of the disabled in general. Yet these institutions provide for less than one per cent of their needs. The *government needs* to upgrade at least 100 institutions to meet current demand.

According to a 1995 study conducted by the non-governmental Association for Health and Environmental Development (AHED), there are 20 special schools for the blind, plus 10 schools with special classes, making a total of 224 classes for blind children. The study, however, indicates that there are 20,000 disabled children enrolled in special schools, among whom 2,200 are either partially sighted or blind.

The study shows that educational facilities fall short of fulfilling the demands of Egypt's blind population. The research was based on 2,616 families living in Ain Helwan. In this sample, 0.5 per cent of children aged between two and 15 are blind or partially blind. The study shows that, according to the most conservative estimates, there are at least 60,000 blind children in Egypt, only 2,200 of whom are enrolled in schools. In other words, only one per cent of those in need of special education are actually receiving it.

"The gap in fulfilling the needs of the blind is largely due to the inaccessibility of facilities for most of the blind population," explains Dr Alaa Shukrallah, general director of AHED. According to Shukrallah, most of the schools and NGOs working in the field are located in Cairo and the Delta; 25 per cent are in Upper Egypt, and none exist in the countryside.

The educational approach itself, Shukrallah adds, is not perfect. Global trends now favour early integration of the physically and mentally challenged into society; more importantly, attempts are being made to increase awareness of the special needs of this sector of the population, and to cater to these needs.

"Blind children give an example of how easy it would be to apply this community-based policy," Shukrallah says. "The isolation of the disabled in general creates a gap between the disabled person and the community. The result is that society is hardly aware of what these people really need."

For Mohammed Said Abdel-Gawwad, a 24-year-old graduate of the Faculty of Languages, schooling was never a problem. He was enrolled at the Taha Hussein specialised school for the blind, where books, assignments and exams were all printed and submitted in Braille.

But even for the privileged few who received schooling, university education remains a major problem. "We feel lost among the sighted students in college, where no facilities whatsoever are provided for the blind, and we are asked to do the same assignments and research work as the other students," explains Abdel-Gawad. "We are not accounted for at all. Some colleges even prohibit recording lectures and we have to depend totally on the students who occasionally volunteer to read us the lectures."

Problems increase several-fold for the few who contemplate a Master's degree. Blind students are not accepted in all branches of education. "Despite the success that many of us could achieve, most people believe we should focus on vocational training," complains Abdel-Gawwad, who is still struggling to enrol for a translation diploma at the Faculty of Languages.

Khater is bitter at the idea that just a few of the facilities to which he had access in the US would make his life much easier — almost normal, in fact. "In the US, where I had a two-month-scholarship, I registered at a special service office, available in every university. Students who volunteer to work there get extra marks for their help," says Khater. "The same system could be *applied here.*"

Khater ran an advertisement requesting an assistant to guide him through the busy city streets, and says he received no fewer than 400 calls. "I wish NGOs would run similar advertisements to give a chance to those who really want to help and just do not know how," he says.

Apart from education, very few facilities are provided to help the blind, and the disabled in general, move freely. *Footpaths, shops* and government institutions are not furnished with ramps, and the disabled are barely accounted for in car parks or in public transport. Other tools that could help the blind walk on their own, like canes or trained dogs, are not provided; telephone calls are not subsidised, although the blind depend mainly on the telephone for communication. "I firmly believe that handicapped people are not disabled because of physical impairment, but because society is not organised to help them fit in," Shukrallah maintains.

Said Abdel-Wahed, a graduate of the Arabic Literature Department of the Faculty of Languages, who is currently working toward his Master's degree, has to think twice before going out on his own. He lives alone in an apartment near university, and has to depend on himself most of the time. "The footpaths are very high, the streets are very dangerous and there are no facilities to help [us] move without stumbling at least once or twice," he says.

Work is another problem. Although labour legislation stipulates that five per cent of employment opportunities be reserved for the disabled, the law is not always strictly enforced. Both Abdel-Wahed and Abdel-Gawad, who were top of their classes at university, were not accepted as teachers in private schools, while all university graduate Mohamed Helmi could get was a part-time administrative job in a government organisation.

"NGOs must make sure the laws are enforced and must make people aware that the disabled represent a strong working force," says Shukrallah.

As part of a community-oriented programme, AHED is networking with all the NGOs working with the disabled. It is also in the process of forming a national task force for the disabled people and their families. "They should be given a chance to represent themselves and put forth their demands, rather than having campaigners stand up for them," says Shukrallah. "The government can then start building on what is already available. Or at least it will take the disabled into account; when building a new road, for example, it could include ramps, which would be costly to build in an already paved road."

Asdiqa' Al-Kafif, or friends of the blind, is engaged in similar activities. The association established a nursery for blind children where they are prepared for education in ordinary schools and, thus, integration into society. The association has also set up a library for the blind, where about 2,000 books are recorded on cassette tapes.

"We focus mainly on helping society and the family to deal with the blind," says Zakariya Fahmi, the chairman of the association. "We offer all *types of services for the blind person, including* medical care, financial support, and problem-solving."

The government is also beginning to address the problem of disability in Egypt. In a recent seminar held at the Red Crescent Society, statistics were cited revealing that six million people in Egypt are disabled. Minister of Social Affairs Mervat Tellawi asserted that more efforts should be exerted to improve the conditions of the disabled in Egypt and to review all the relevant laws.

The Cabinet Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) also undertook fieldwork on disability in Egypt, which developed into a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy involving a number of ministries. It is being carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Health, and aims to provide more educational facilities, build more schools, upgrade the services of 100 organisations working in the field of disability, provide medical services and create more job opportunities for the disabled.

To help solve the reading and writing problems of the educated blind, the IDSC has adopted a technological rehabilitation programme, which is part of the government's broader strategy. The centre established a number of computer labs at Cairo and Ain Shams universities, in schools affiliated to the Al-Nour Wal-Amal non-governmental association, and at the non-governmental Demonstration Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Blind.

"The project was based on a study showing that computers can solve a major part of the blind's reading and writing problems," says Abdel-Moneim Hamada, the project supervisor and co-ordinator at the IDSC. Hamada explains that a page that takes 45 minutes to be written in Braille takes only 15 to 17 minutes to be written on the computer and printed in the same way.

The specialised labs are furnished with computers with sound cards that pronounce every key the user clicks. The computers are also hooked up to scanners that convert pages into text files; then the computer can read the text through a speech synthesiser. Texts can also be printed out in Braille, as some of the computers are connected to Braille printers.

So far, the programme has made headway. The IDSC provided 448 blind people and prospective teachers with special computer training, and another 89 students are being enrolled for training at the Cairo University lab, where supervisors have to work late to meet increasing demand. At a specialised government school in Giza, students spend most of their leisure time in computer training. Teachers there write their exams and notes on computers and print them in Braille so that blind students can read them.

"The program did solve a lot of our problems," Abdel-Wahed says. "The computer saves time and effort, and helps us get jobs we wouldn't have otherwise."

However, as is the case of many rehabilitation programmes in Egypt, the funds needed to provide maintenance and allow further expansion represent an obstacle. Hamada maintains that the role of the centre should end with setting up the labs and propagating the idea. "We do not have funds to do any maintenance work or to provide the labs with paper or other computers," he says. "We hope that other organisations or foreign donors will take over."

Should the ministries of education, higher education or social affairs take up the gauntlet, or is it up to NGOs or foreign donors to sustain the computer rehabilitation programme and other rehabilitation programmes for the blind? These are questions yet to be answered.

Losing sight, gaining insight

Ibtisam Abaza is a woman whose blindness did not stop her from attaining a high degree, making a career, doing voluntary work, getting married and raising three children

This 55-year-old psychologist at Al-Nour Wal-Amal association and the founder of Dar Al-Kitab Al-Nateq, an NGO devoted to recording books for the blind, was the first blind woman to enter a university in the early '60s.

Her first name is significant: it means a smile. The dark glasses and the veil she wears hardly hide the radiance of her face. Her smile and relaxed tone speak inner power, confidence and contentment, writes **Gihan Shahine**.

Abaza sits in her office at Al-Nour Wal-Amal, sipping tea and reminiscing. The atmosphere is friendly: students, supervisors and teachers, all of whom live in the same darkness, *stop to listen to her stories.*

Abaza gradually lost her sight due to an accident she had as a child. She left school for a year and went to Al-Nour Wal-Amal for vocational training, since there were no specialised schools for the blind at the time.

Abaza was too ambitious to give up her studies. She studied for secondary school at home, finishing the three years in one year, the time allotted for home study then. "I had a hard time doing all that work in one year instead of three," Abaza says. "But I received great help and encouragement from my family, friends and neighbours, who all read and explained lessons for me."

Exams were a *big* problem. "The educational system did not take the blind into account at that time, and I was the only blind girl enrolled in a secondary school," Abaza adds. After a series of negotiations, the Ministry of Education finally agreed to provide Abaza with an assistant to write for her during the exams. "But the assistant was extremely incompetent, and I had to dictate every single letter in a very limited time."

College was a turning point in Abaza's life. As the first blind woman to enter university, Abaza was the heroine of tales that her friends at Al-Nour Wal-Amal invented, and an example for following generations. "Blind people started to believe in themselves and feel that they could also pursue their studies as I had," Abaza continues. "And by the time I entered university, the association had established the first-ever specialised school for the blind."

Abaza studied philosophy and psychology at Cairo University's Faculty of Arts, and took part in political activities and seminars.

"The '60s were the heyday of political activism," she remembers. "At that time, I was a Communist, and I defended my views in classes and seminars."

Abaza was so active in class that some of her professors did not realise she was blind. Though unable to read, browsing through books remained a special treat, and in this she depended on her father, friends and colleagues.

But her neighbour, who later became her husband, was her greatest help. He shared her reading interests, accompanied her to seminars and conferences, and had the same political views. "Our interest in books developed into love, that ended happily in marriage," Abaza says, as her face lights up. "Even now you won't find a corner of the house that doesn't hold a book."

Abaza graduated in 1967 and launched into a career as a psychologist for the blind. She spent 20 years as psychologist at the Specialised Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Blind and another 10 years at Al-Nour Wal-Amal. During that time, she obtained two diplomas in mental health, got married and gave birth to three children.

Her career as a psychologist, and being blind herself, has helped Abaza define the main problems that blind people face in Egypt. "The blind cannot see, but we have other potentials, which, if encouraged, enable us to cope normally with life," she says. "The problem, however, is that society does not give the blind much credit, and so does not help them live normally." Abaza insists that parents should learn how to deal with their blind children normally in order to increase their confidence and self-reliance. "Parents should, for example, let their children use knives, light matches and go out on their own," Abaza explains.

To increase social awareness, Abaza suggests that special television programmes provide instructions on how to deal with blind people.

Abaza laments the lack of educational facilities available for the educated blind. "The material printed in Braille or recorded on cassettes is no more than the school syllabus and some short stories for children," she notes. "University students have no access to books *or references.*"

Abaza decided to make a difference. She established Dar Al-Kitab Al-Nateq, an NGO which records Arabic reference books for university students. The association was officially registered at the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1990 and has so far recorded 4,000 cassettes, distributed freely to blind students; but, concludes Abaza, "we still depend totally on donations and we need the support of society to be able to continue providing this service."

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

227 Only two years after the 1910 assassination of Prime Minister Butros Ghali, three men with suspected links to the Nationalist Party were arrested in connection with what some termed "the great conspiracy". The intended targets for assassination were the nation's three most powerful men — the khedive, the prime minister and British High Commissioner Lord Kitchner, whose country had occupied Egypt in 1882. Despite their denials, the three accused were found guilty of involvement in the abortive assassination plot and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, the maximum penalty under the law. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** recounts the story of the plot and the trial on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*

The "great conspiracy" of the summer of 1912 had Egyptians on tenterhooks, even if *Al-Ahram* was inclined to play down the incident.

"Great" was too formidable a word to apply to three young men from the Nationalist Party who had been arrested on suspicion of plotting to assassinate the khedive, the British high commissioner and the prime minister. The scope of the purported "conspiracy" was too small. *Al-Ahram* also wrote, "The reports on the incident appear to be blown out of proportion. One hopes that there is no call for anxiety and that this incident will not damage Egypt's reputation abroad, particularly as the mere mention of political plots and intrigues shakes the confidence of financial circles."

Other newspapers were not so unperturbed, particularly those closer to the centres of power. The conspiracy, they insisted, was "great". It targeted the three most important political figures in the country.

Indeed, they had some cause for consternation, as barely more than two years had passed since the assassination of Prime Minister Butros Ghali by Ibrahim El-Wardani. Moreover, El-Wardani's co-conspirators and fellow members in the Brotherhood Solidarity Society had been let off since Egyptian law at the time of Ghali's assassination did not incriminate "collusion with the intent to commit a crime." Such a law was promulgated in 1910, adding another dimension that piqued the curiosity of the public, as the 1912 incident was bound to be a test case for this law. The sensation this case stirred was compounded by the fact that there was a connection between El-Wardani and the suspects in the "collusion" to assassinate the men *Al-Ahram* called "the three chief rulers of the country." These suspects had been seen at El-Wardani's grave, taking an oath to avenge him. In spite of its eagerness to downplay the incident, *Al-Ahram* still had to sate the curiosity of its readers. Its first report appeared on 4 July 1910 when it announced, "The Public Prosecutor's Office has arrested Mohamed Taher El-Arabi, accused of planning to assassinate Lord Kitchner. The suspect is currently being held in the Court of Appeals Prison."

El-Arabi had been a student at Victoria College. Along with El-Arabi, three other suspects were taken into custody. The first was Mohamed Imam Wakid, "a former student from El-Saadiya School from which he was expelled for causing disruption with his frequent pro-nationalist demonstrations." The second was Mohamed Abdel-Salam, described by *Al-Ahram* as, "a former mathematics teacher at Mustafa Kamel School and then a reporter for *El-Liwa*." As for the third, Abdel-Rahman El-Sabahi, "he had been one of the accused in the El-Wardani case, but was acquitted together with his fellow conspirators."

The report continues, "El-Arabi was chosen by the three other suspects to murder the prime minister. He went to Alexandria and chose a position outside Zizinya Palace so he could observe the comings and goings of His Excellency. As the prime minister was always closely guarded by secret police, El-Arabi returned to Cairo. When he informed his accomplices that he was unable to get within range of his target, they told him instead to murder Lord Kitchner. El-Arabi went to the train station to await the arrival of Kitchner who was due to arrive from Sakha. Kitchner's aide-de-camp immediately recognised the young man, because the chief of police had sent drawings of the conspirators to the office of the high commissioner following their clandestine meeting at El-Wardani's grave."

The report of the arrests reads like a film script. On the evening of 2 July, three police officers, disguised as farmers, took up positions in the Café des Familles in Shubra, which investigations revealed the young men frequented. At 9.00 the men appeared, sat at a table in the café's garden, and "began to discuss how to assassinate His Royal Highness the Khedive, and their excellencies the prime minister and Lord Kitchner. At 11.00 they left the café in order to take the tramway bound for the centre of town. At Shubra police station, police arrested all but one. El-Sabahi managed to escape. Upon searching the suspects, police discovered that Waked carried a Browning revolver, loaded with four bullets. Police then launched a search of the suspects' homes and other premises they thought necessary."

The first thing the public prosecutor did was to go to the Café des Familles on 4 July in order to watch a re-enactment of the stakeout. The three accused and the three undercover police were all present, "and the prosecutor questioned them about their testimony for several hours."

Subsequently, the public prosecutor questioned the policemen's captain and Kitchner's aide-de-camp. The latter testified that, on Sunday 30 June, he saw Mohamed Taher El-Arabi "loitering in a suspicious manner" as Lord Kitchner's train was pulling into the station. He had recognised the young man immediately.

Establishing "collusion" was the investigators' primary concern in the initial phases of the investigation. Towards this end, police brought into custody several other individuals suspected of having advance knowledge of the plot. One was El-Sabahi who was released only a few hours after his arrest, "since police could establish no evidence linking him with the suspects." The others were Ali Fahmi Kamel and Hassan Husni Kamel, brothers of the late nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel. Both were released after interrogation. The police then turned to organisations known to be closely connected to Nationalist Party circles. One such organisation was the Higher Educational Institutes Club, in which, according to some newspaper reports, police discovered documents related to the case. In fact, however, the only papers of note were the records of Wakid's membership in the club. "The Club takes this occasion to announce that it is purely an educational and literary society and that it has no political involvement whatsoever in keeping with its charter which the Club's board of directors observes vigilantly," announced *Al-Ahram* on behalf of the Club.

Al-Ahram, on 9 July, felt it its duty to remind its fellow newspapers of their responsibilities. The message still rings true today:

"Whether evidence is sufficient to level charges of conspiracy or not, it is not the task of the press to express an opinion one way or another. To side with or against a suspect in a case before the courts means exceeding the bounds of our profession, which is solely to report the facts... To do otherwise is to throw the public into confusion and to undermine the government's mission to establish justice."

Not everyone shared *Al-Ahram's* eagerness to play down the case. In the UK, Foreign Secretary Edward Gray subtly reminded the House of Commons that the subject should not be open to discussion as long as it was still before the courts. "I am glad that the plot was discovered before it was implemented," he added.

In Egypt, meanwhile, there was an outpouring of public sympathy for the assassins' targets. *Al-Ahram* reports that dozens of delegations from all provinces began to flock to Abdin Palace, even though the khedive was not in Cairo at the time, to express their joy that the khedive was safe.

Three weeks after their arrest, one of the accused, Mohamed Abdel-Salam, caved in to his interrogators' tactics and confessed to "collusion with criminal intent." *Al-Ahram* was quick to suspect some form of coercion. It remarked: "The suspect confessed just after he had met his wife and children in prison. He must have imagined that his confession would exempt him from punishment, particularly as he claimed that he only pretended to take part in the conspiracy in order to tip off the police."

Once they felt that they had gathered sufficient evidence, the prosecution brought the case before the National Court in order to determine the court of competency. The hearing took place on 25 July. *Al-Ahram's* court correspondent describes the scene: "The three defendants stood before the judge, their hands and feet unbound. Behind them stood a line of police guards and their lawyers stood before them."

Illustration: Makram Henein

Abdel-Salem confessed to the charges and his colleagues continued to deny them. The public prosecutor then stated the causes for the charges. Two days later, the judge announced his ruling: the defendants would be tried before the criminal court several days later.

What *Al-Ahram* could not know was that Milne Cheetham, acting high commissioner, had been in constant contact with his superiors in London with regard to the nature of the trial. The subject had provoked some consternation in the House of Commons, where the members had questioned Sir Edward Gray about the nature of the trial. Gray assured them that the trial would be conducted in accordance with the ordinary legal procedures. Clearly the popular outcry that followed the extraordinary Dinshaway trial was still fresh in the minds of the British authorities.

Cheetham thus outlined the primary features of the trial. The suspects would be brought before the ordinary national courts on the charge of conspiracy to commit assassinations, a crime which was punishable under Egyptian law by a maximum term of 15 years imprisonment. Moreover, the trial would be public and the tribunal would be composed entirely of Egyptian magistrates.

The trial began on 11 August. The defendants persisted in their denial of the charges against them. Imam Waked told the court that the charges against him were concocted, that he never went to Alexandria and that he did not even know where the prime minister's residence was located.

Mohamed Abdel-Salam told the court that the police had tortured him during investigations and asked for closed session in order to display the wounds on his stomach. "I only confessed because the police commandant deceived me and because I missed my poor wife."

The prosecution and defence attorneys then brought in their witnesses.

While the prosecution sought to portray the defendants as "young extremist zealots" who had been under police surveillance, the primary strategy of the defence was to refute the charge of criminal conspiracy. The judges then returned to their chambers to determine the verdict. Their deliberations lasted no more than a quarter of an hour. When they re-emerged, the presiding magistrate pronounced his ruling. The defendants were guilty and were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Upon hearing the sentences, *Al-Ahram* reports, "the defendants appeared visibly shaken as they surrendered their hands to the fetters."

On 15 August, the British adviser to the Ministry of Justice completed his translation of the court's ruling into English and submitted it to Cheetham who in turn dispatched it to the Foreign Office. More detailed than the version that appeared in *Al-Ahram*, the verdict established that the conspirators were serious in their intent to commit the assassinations they had plotted and that the suspicious actions of the defendants and the testimony of the various witnesses sustained this judgment.

The verdict, however, would not pass without some sign of public reaction. On 19 August *Al-Ahram* reported that posters had been pasted up on walls "inciting the Egyptian people to rise up against the Egyptian and British governments and promising the convicted young men that they would soon be avenged in a manner that would shake the entire world." Such actions, the newspaper warned, were the "utmost folly" and two days later it featured a lengthy article in which it counselled students to "refrain from such behaviour which only brings further harm to the nation." It was sound advice, but it went unheeded. A subsequent wave of assassination attempts gave the occupying power the perfect excuse to tighten its grip on the country.

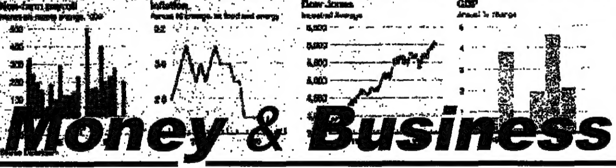


The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

High investment returns in Egypt

SAUDI investor Sheikh Salih Kamel stated that the investment return rate in Egypt is rising higher than those found in Asia and Eastern European countries. Egypt's investment climate is extremely favourable to Arab and foreign investors, he said, especially with regards to major national projects currently taking place in Toshka and Sinai, thanks to the incentives given by President Hosni Mubarak which encourage investors to take advantage of all facilities offered to them.

Kamel said that Egypt occupies second place after Saudi Arabia concerning the volume of investment, which reached $532 million in the fields of industry, agriculture, housing and tourism. Tourism in itself covers the lion's share of investment revenue in Egypt.



Economic cooperation between Egypt and the G-15

WITHIN the framework of the preparatory meetings of the G-15 — due in Cairo in May — the foreign trade sector, affiliated with the Ministry of Trade and Supply, has begun to prepare an overall concept for the best way of promoting cooperation between members of the group. This involves strengthening unity between Egypt and group members, as well as lifting obstacles to cooperation.

The mechanism to be suggested by the ministry during the meetings will be to establish joint committees of businessmen in Egypt and other member countries, in addition to the establishment of joint financial institutions to cover commercial and non-commercial risks.

CEBIT '98 Hannover, in a league of its own

CEBIT Hannover — which recently took place from 19-25 March — is one of the largest commercial fairs in the world, with 7,250 exhibitors participating in 371,003 square metres of exhibition space this year alone.

CEBIT constantly offers a wide-ranging programme of presentations which help to throw light on the most recent industrial and technological trends. For example:

1- Security information centre;

The security information centre made a presentation in Hall 23, this year in the presence of 100,000 visitors. The aim of the presentation is to display the latest developments in the field of security information.

2- Network information centre:

Deutche Messe Aj this year sponsored the network information centre which presented the most recent technologies in the network field.

3- Satellites:

What can satellites offer in the field of business telecommunications? What technologies and applications can satellites offer and what deals are available in the business and service sectors?

Answers to all such questions were displayed in the satellite presentation which was presented for the first time at CEBIT '98.

4- Programmes centre for small- and medium-sized companies:

This was exhibited over 5,300 square metres of floor space in Hall 4. It was one of the largest CEBIT presentations, with more than 300 companies displaying over1,000 programmes in the business sector.

5- Media sector:

Last year, the media group achieved great success and hence became an integral part of the CEBIT '98 programme. It displayed a group of presentations on various fields of the media in Hall 8, over a space of 940 square metres.

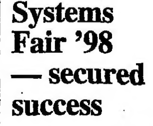
During the opening session of the fair, Dr George Shoumberg, manager of CEBIT Hannover fairs, said that CEBIT's participation in Al-Ahram's seventh exhibition for computer and information technologies (ACITEX) — to be held from 3-6 February 1999 — reflects its great appreciation of the Al-Ahram exhibition and the importance it sees in attending annually.

The German Arab Chamber of Commerce is the sponsor of CEBIT fairs in Egypt.

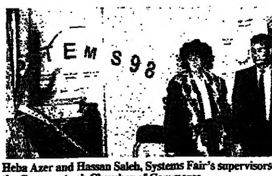
Mohamed Youssef Habib

L-R: Helmut Kohl, German chancellor and Al-Ahram's Mohamed Youssef Habib with Dr George Shoumberg

CeBIT 98



Systems Fair '98 — secured success



Heba Azer and Hassan Saleh, Systems Fair's supervisors at the German Arab Chamber of Commerce

THE anticipated success of the Systems Fair 1998 — to be held in the Munich Exhibition Centre from 19 - 23 October — is reflected largely in the huge number of exhibitors requesting booths at the fair.

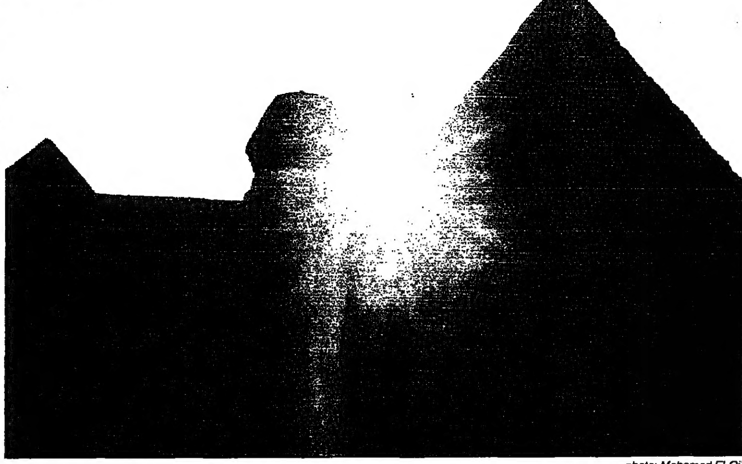
Systems Fair '98 will specialise in exhibiting the latest international technologies in the fields of telecommunications, computers and networks.

It is also worth mentioning the fact that the Systems Fair successfully cooperates with the Al-Ahram Exhibition for Computer and Information Technology (ACITEX), each fair usually participating in the other's.

Al-Ahram

2 - 8 April 1998

The Sphinx and the equinox


photo: Mohamed El-Qi'i

THE SPHINX was not sculpted haphazardly from a piece of existing rock as some claim. Observance of a natural phenomenon suggests a solar connection. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

For the first time, the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) has celebrated an equinox over the Sphinx, a phenomenon that occurs twice a year: 21 March and 21 September, each lasting for half an hour.

Last Saturday, at around 5pm, when the sun started to sink in the west, its face visible directly between the pyramids of Khafre and Khufu, its rays were first cast on the left shoulder of the Sphinx, then, as the sun sank further, the rays emerged from behind the Pyramid of Khafre to cast light on its right shoulder.

"This supports the theory that the Sphinx was sculpted in this particular area for religious purposes and that the choice of site was not haphazard as suggested by some," said Zahi Hawass, director of the Giza Plateau. Hawass also believes that the Sphinx bears a special relationship to the three Pyramids.

Hawass said that this is a "normal astronomical event that was observed by the Ancient Egyptians who were advanced in astrology, worshipped the sun and had a knack for positioning some of their monuments in such a way that they captured the sun's rays during the equinox, which occurs twice a year in Abu Simbel, and twice annually in Giza."

Khufu takes a well-earned rest

The Great Pyramid will be closed to visitors for eight months from 1 April. But that is only one side of the story, as **Nevine El-Aref** reports

The big guy is taking a much-deserved rest. The Great Pyramid of Khufu will be closed for restoration for eight months as of 1 April, while the recently restored "third" Pyramid of Menkaure has been reopened.

"It is being closed for a period of recuperation from an overdose of visitors," said Zahi Hawass, director of the plateau.

The number of visitors inside the burial chamber since the monument opened its doors last year following an earlier restoration, "induced salt efflorescence on the walls. Each person produces 20 grams of water which creates salt encrustation," Hawass explained. During the high season (before the Luxor massacre last November halted the tourist flow) about 4,000 people visited the monument during the peak winter season.

The last closing of Khufu's Pyramid was six years ago when 5cm of encrusted salt was removed from the walls of the Grand Gallery.

This time, restoration will include filling in cracks that have appeared in the walls, plus removing salt particles and graffiti left by some of the visitors. New lighting and ventilation systems will be installed by a French mission, the granite blocks that lead to the burial chamber will be restored, the stairway to the King's Chamber will be modified, and the lower chamber that lies 100 metres beneath the pyramid will be restored, Hawass said.

"Once this work is completed, the subterranean chamber, and the one erroneously dubbed The Queen's Chamber in the superstructure, will be opened to visitors for the first time," said Hawass. "A study will be carried out during restoration to ascertain the reason why there is an accumulation of humidity on the walls of the first and second parts of the Grand Gallery but not on the rest of it."

Hawass, who knows the Giza Plateau like the back of his hand, believes that Khufu departed from the earlier royal tradition of burial beneath the pyramid, to a burial chamber situated within the superstructure, "because he instigated a religious revolution in his time, claiming that he was the son of Re, the sun-god, during his own lifetime and not only after his death." Hawass suggests that Khufu started to build his burial chamber beneath the pyramid, like his predecessors, but that in the fifth year of his reign he left the subterranean chamber unfinished and constructed another room, the so-called Queen's Chamber.

"For architectural reasons, Khufu left this room unfinished and built a third room inside the pyramid where he was actually buried," he said.

The decision to close the Great Pyramid comes as part of the plateau's general management plan to close and restore the world-famous monuments in rotation. "Each year, one pyramid will be closed for restoration and another will be opened," said Hawass. "Next month Khufu will be closed, but the Pyramid of Menkaure, is already open."

Hawass had much to say about progress on the master plan which was drawn up for Giza several years ago. The first two stages of the four-stage plan have already been completed.

The first phase of this long-term project was concerned with access to the site and the movement of visitors and vehicles. A one-way road system has already been established and a separate entrance fee for vehicles introduced to regulate movement and reduce traffic.

"A new entrance gate and car park has been built near Mena House Hotel and an admission fee is now charged to all visitors, regardless of whether they go inside the monuments or simply tour the area," Hawass said.

The second phase aims to make the history of the monuments more comprehensible to visitors. Some modern buildings have already been removed and new sites opened in order to encourage visitors to stay longer on the plateau and spread themselves more thinly, in the hope that the more vulnerable areas would be less crowded. The road built across the ruins of Khufu's mortuary temple in 1949 was removed, the basalt pavement of the temple cleared, and a boat pit on the northeast side of the pyramid re-excavated.

Phase three, prepared in cooperation with UNESCO, largely concerns improvement in visitor management and facilities: the establishment of a ring road around the plateau, two educational centres to provide archaeological information and tourist facilities as well as the relocation of the horse and camel stables to an area south of the plateau along with a picnic and recreation area.

As part of the final stage, the granite casing on the lower courses of Menkaure's pyramid will be replaced. "This is the only pyramid at Giza encased with granite around its lower courses. After the fall of the Old Kingdom, the casing stones fell down and were never replaced — not until now, that is," Hawass said.

It is no easy task. The fallen blocks found around three sides of the pyramid have already been documented. "This is very important because it provides clues as to the original location of every fallen block," said Hawass. Excavations will then be carried out to search for more blocks, "and, hopefully, something about Menkaure's funerary equipment." Finally, a photogrammetric map of the pyramid will be made. "This will provide us with detailed information about the pyramid surface," Hawass said, "It will be made before removing the fallen blocks, which may be covering vital and long-sought evidence of building ramps and construction methods."


Horses will be banned from the plateau in future

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza, Heliopolis, Tahrir, Giza, Ramses Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. [illegible]

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm, LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm, LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with private access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE25; from the airport LE27 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE3[illegible]
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 9am, then 9am, 10am, 3pm and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramses Street. Tickets LE15 each way

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am)
Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners, LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Turbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal, LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm
Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. *Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or* Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, $177 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE199 for Egyptians, $128 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE229 for Egyptians, $69 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE232 for Egyptians, $72 plus LE5 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***

Taking a trip back to the simple life

Rural tourism is a new concept in travel worldwide. In Egypt, the idea is still in its infancy, but is nevertheless being explored by a number of investors. **Rehab Saad** looks into its potential

Tourism trends are changing. In the past travellers were inevitably attracted to ancient history and travelled to places where they could view the remains of past civilisations. Then came the phase of recreational tourism, with beaches and water sports as the attraction. Next was the concept of "theme tourism" in which a traveller may choose a country for a shopping spree, an exhibition, or to attend a conference.

Now, a new concept has emerged: rural tourism where visitors can immerse themselves in the lives of villagers, watch them at their daily chores, feeding the animals, cooking, and doing crafts. It is surprising how many visitors are attracted to an insight into contemporary village life, and have already travelled to some European countries, plus Tunisia and other Arab countries in search of it.

Egypt is now looking into this new idea, and some investors are so encouraged by the potential that they have already started work. They've chosen some areas (Fayoum, Gharbiyya province in the Delta, Luxor, Saqqara and other places) to carry out feasibility studies. These plans aim at improving the infrastructure while maintaining a genuine village aura, making them more accessible, and building simple clubs and motels.

Some Egyptian villages actually started welcoming foreign visitors many years ago. They recognised their interest and invited them to stay in their houses for a week or two and share their lives with them. Reactions were extremely positive. Two examples of this are the Nubian village on Elephantine Island in Aswan, and Gurna village on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor.

In both areas, villagers are used to foreigners. After all, their villages are situated in historical and archaeological zones. It is therefore easy to invite curious visitors to come and sample their traditional food, and invite them to stay for a few days. "We call this 'tourism of traditions'," said Mohamed Ramadan, a villager in Gurna. "People never forget the days they spend with us and they remain in touch with us."

"Luxor attracted travellers long ago, not only because of its famous monuments, but also for its rural surroundings," said Kamal Abul-Kheir, board chairman of Kimidar Travel and sponsor of a recent conference on rural tourism in Hurghada. "Tourism is successful there because it combines two important elements," he said, "ancient sites and a rural atmosphere." Abul-Kheir stressed that the keys to success are a sound infrastructure and an awareness among the people of the importance of tourism in their lives.

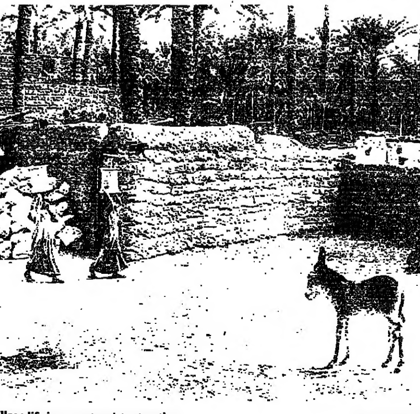
Some pioneering investors, intent on having a slice of the pie in developing villages for tourism, are already looking into their infrastructures. In Gharbiyya Governorate, the village of Lomana was chosen as having all the necessary prerequisites to start such an activity. It is 35 kilometres from Queissna airport, and 11 kilometres from Mansoura city, which is famous for historically important buildings — like the house of Ibn Luqman, where Louis IX was interred during the crusades. It is also 30 kilometres from Mehalla El-Kobra, which is famous for its textiles and cotton industry.

The people of Lomana are enthusiastic about developing their village. Turning it into a tourist destination would benefit them financially and socially. About 1,500 villagers have volunteered to take part in the project.

"Some villagers have proposed building a second floor to their houses to be rented to foreigners. Others have suggested building small cafeterias and motels of 10 rooms," said Abul-Kheir.

Fayoum is also targeted for rural development. A project will be established northeast of Lake Qarun where a motel, cafe, and country club will be built. Another possibility is the area of Batn El-Baqara near Wadi Rayan where investors will depend on the desert environment and waterfalls as added attractions.

According to Adel El-Guindy of the Tourist Development Authority (TDA), a study is being carried out to decide which villages could be developed, "because they are within reach of an ancient site, a museum, or whatever." A committee was recently formed of representatives of Cairo University and the Administrative Development Authority and eight villages in different governorates have been chosen for survey: Sharqiya, Menufiya, Beheira, Minya, Sohag, Aswan, Fayoum and Giza.


Village life is a new tourist attraction
photo: Al-Ahram

Shut your trap

With the deadly silence of the Pyramids in the background and the thunder of gunfire still ringing in her ears, **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** sat down to describe this year's Shooting World Cup before the Mafia could catch up with her



Henrick from Germany, silver medalist in the skeet event *photo: Emad Nassn*

335 men and women representing 46 countries participated in the first opening Shooting World Cup in Egypt. There were three events: double trap, trap and skeet. This cup is a qualifying competition for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. Each country was represented by a team of three players, plus two individuals in the Minimum Qualifying Score (MQS) section. The individual MQS entrants are looking to score 112 out of 125 in the trap event, 118 out of 150 in the double trap and 114 out of 125 in the skeet.

Instead of shooting at pigeons sent to fly aimlessly and unluckily to a cruel death, they now take aim at clay black targets against a background of brownish desert. All three events were held at the Armed Forces Shooting Club with a spectacular view of the Pyramids.

"It's not the first time Egypt has hosted the World Cup," said Major General Mounir Thabet, member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), president of the Egyptian National Olympic Committee (NOC) and technical manager of the Egyptian Shooting Federation. "We organised World Cups in 1991, '92, '93 and '94, as well as this year." What makes a good marksman: "Good eyesight, cool nerves, quick reflexes and a bit of physical fitness." Union Internationale de Tir (U.I.T) technical delegate, 78-year-old Fredrick Stanislav of Poland, praised the organiser: "We chose Egypt to host an important competition like this because the staff of the federation are specialists." The person who takes the first place in each event has a quota place to represent his country at the Olympics.

Seventy-two team members plus 50 MQS competitors took part in the trap event. They stood above a trap rotating through 5 stations with 3 machines below throwing 125 targets, all at different speeds, angles and altitudes. Entrants have to shoot 75 clay targets on the first day and 50 on the second. The time allocated is half an hour. They have to concentrate more than 100 per cent, since they can't know the direction of the target in advance.

The first six go forward to a 25-target final round. Italian Marco Venturini won the individual trap event, shooting a total of 144 targets. The Italian team, made up of Venturini and his colleagues Daniele Cioni and Sandro Macabbi, took first place with 355 points out of 375. Egypt came ninth with 316 points. Sherif Saleh came 16th with 316, Adham Medhat 37th with 106, and Hamdi Essam 63rd with 97. Hussein El-Deeb took 80, and Tarek Sabet took 59 in the MQS competition.

Twenty-nine entrants took part in the women's trap event. They shot 75 targets in the first round, with another 25 for the six finalists. Roberta Pelosi from Italy came first with a new world record of 89 out of 100. The three Egyptian participants, Rawia Badr El-Din, Mona Hawari and Dina Shabaan came last. But at least Italy didn't come first in the team event as their men's team did. That honour fell to Russia, represented by Irina Latricheva, Elena Rabaia and Maria Volkova, who took 191 points altogether, pushing the Italians back into fourth place.

In the double trap event, there were 56 team guns and 10 MQS individuals taking part. Only the three central machines in the trap are used. Each gun has to shoot 50 targets from each machine, thrown at different speeds, angles and altitudes. The six finalists then face a further round of 50 targets. The Australian Michael Diamond came first, with 176 out of 200 targets, and the Australian team — Michael Diamond, Brett Hall and Adam Vella — won the team event with 395 out of 450. For Egypt, Ayman Mazhar came 32nd with 118 points, Hossam Fouad came 39th with 113, Mohamed Meligui came 45th with 109, and the team was thus placed 12th. Mohamed Shazli took 123 and Gaber Hafiza 116 in the MQS event.

The women's double trap event was dominated by China. They shoot 100 targets, with an extra 25 targets for the first six finalists. Hengping Ding topped the event with 106 points. Teamed with Yunxia Wu and Yingzi Liu, he helped China to first place, with a total of 287 out of 375. Egypt did not participate.

More fans turned out for the skeet, shooting's most popular event. 75 targets on the first day and 50 on the second day are thrown from a high and a low tower, followed by another final round of 25 flashing targets for the first six finalists. It is both the easiest and the most interesting event, since the direction of the target is known. There are only three possibilities: a target from the high tower, one from the low tower, and one from each tower at the same time. The marksman rotates through eight curved stations from the high tower to the low, ending in the middle. If you concentrate hard, it's quite possible to shoot all the targets, without exception, so contests tend to be close fought. One hundred and three guns took part in the men's skeet event. Andrea Benelli, a 38-year-old Italian, came first with a total of 148 points. He took 112 in last year's World Championship in Peru, and was third in the last Olympics. The Italian team — Benelli, Ennio Falco and Sergio Forlano — came first with 364 out of 375. Unfortunately twice-World Champion Abdallah El-Rashidi from Kuwait took only 118 out of 125, failing to make the final round. "It is my first competition this season," said Rashidi, "and I always start slowly, because the weather at this time of year is unstable and very discouraging. But with God's help I end victoriously, with my record 125 out of 125 in the main shooting." He was not frustrated by his loss since he is confident of his abilities and knows that better results are to come. Khaled Thabet and Mohamed Khorshid came equal ninth on 119 points ahead of El-Rashidi, and Mostafa Hamdi came 16th.

In the women's individual skeet event, 19 women participated, shooting only 75 targets plus 25 for the six finalists. Shan Zhan from China came first with 94 points. Egypt, again, were not represented.

Is it a coincidence that the best marksmen come from the land of the Mafia, where "shooting is a popular traditional sport with important competitions every week," as Benelli said? The States, Australia, China and Japan are also strong contenders.

On the beach

ALONG with the squash grand prix, *Al-Ahram* also organised its annual international tae kwon do championship. For two days, players from six countries participated in a setting as fascinating as that of the squash championship. This time, it was a special venue, a theatre, built in the old Roman style, at Hurghada's coral beach. Mexico, France, Spain, Turkey, Korea and Egypt took part. Each country was represented by two teams, A and B.

The competition, drawing some of the world's top players, in turn generated a high spectator turnout.

President of the Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation, Mustafa Bakir, said that it was the first time a tae kwon do tournament was played outdoors. "Usually, the game is played indoors. But *Al-Ahram* changed that, and organised everything perfectly," said Bakir. "At the beginning, when we broached the idea, officials of the international federation were worried. But when they came and saw for themselves, they were amazed," he added.

Mexico snatched first place, collecting 14 points from two gold medals. Egypt's A team took second place with three silver and a bronze. Turkey came in third with a gold. Korea also won a gold, but Turkey excelled on weight difference. Spain was fifth with one silver and two bronze.

Egypt's B team won one bronze to finish sixth. France came last with zero medals. Seven points were awarded for the gold medal, three for the silver and one for the bronze.

The players competed in four weight categories: under-58 kilos, under-68 kilos, under-80 kilos and over-80 kilos. The categories will be applied in the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, the first time that tae kwon do will enter the Olympics. In past Olympics, it was an exhibition sport.

This year's tournament was played as a one-round league system, as opposed to the usual knockout system applied in all world championships.



photo: Hossam Diab

New queen of squash

Australia's world number 2 Michelle Martin ended a year-long run of defeats against compatriot and world champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald to win the grand prix finals in squash. **Inas Mazhar** reports from the Egyptian resort town of Hurghada, site of the victory

Before more than 500 spectators who filled the stands of a squash court on an island in Hurghada, Michelle Martin defeated her 29-year-old opponent, Sarah Fitz-Gerald, to claim the world grand prix title on Friday. Fitz-Gerald, the Melbourne-based world champion, had held a 7-1 head-to-head advantage over Martin since losing the British Open final to her in April last year. But in Hurghada, Martin proved too much, winning 9-3, 9-5, 3-9 and 9-3.

For her winning effort, Martin, a Sydney-based 30-year-old, collected $7,700, while Fitz-Gerald pocketed $6,300.

Third place went to England's Sue Wright when her opponent, Australia's Liz Irving, the number eight seed who recorded the tournament's surprise by reaching the semifinals, retired hours before the match because of a backache. Wright collected $5,250 and Irving $4,550. Players who placed fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth each won $2,800. In all, the tournament dished out $43,000 in prize money.

In the past 12 months, Fitz-Gerald has won six of the designated eight world grand prix tournaments. Martin won the remaining two.

Fitz-Gerald also won the Australian Open for the first time when she beat Martin in the final.

Following the game, Martin thanked *Al-Ahram* for hosting the event and organising it in what she called "a wonderful place" that she, together with the rest of the players, enjoyed.

"This is a good psychological result as well as a small piece of history, winning the first grand prix finals. Just breaking the sequence against Sarah may prove the most important thing," said Martin.

She added that she was a bit worried about playing in such exotic conditions, given that the more staid British Open starts in Birmingham next week.

But Andrew Shelley, the director of the Women's International Squash Professional Association, WISPA, had no such concerns. He was full of superlatives for the venue. "Fantastic, sensational and amazing," Shelley said. "Everything was perfect in Hurghada for the good of the game and for the sake of its promotion. All squash courts are similar in the way they look inside, but what matters to the players was the outside, which was great. The place will definitely raise Egypt's standing in the world of squash." Shelley praised the prize money *Al-Ahram* offered which, he added, attracted top players.

Collin McQuillan, squash correspondent for the British daily *The Times*, said that it was extraordinary to see a glass court erected on an island and stands built around it, describing it as a landmark. "The photos that came out of it were excellent, and I am sure they will help attract the game's enthusiasts here to spend a week in the sun and enjoy watching next year's finals if they are to take place here in Hurghada," McQuillan said.

Only the world's top eight female players were allowed to compete in Hurghada, which signals the climax of the squash season. They are selected on the basis of their performance in other competitions during the year.

The organisation of the Hurghada event plus the Pyramids spectacular of last year helped reinforce *Al-Ahram's* worldwide reputation as a promoter of squash.



Australia's world number 2 Michelle Martin

Sweet revenge

IN A polished performance, Ahli's women's volleyball team captured the 13th African clubs championship, defeating arch-rivals Bousta of Kenya 3-0. Ahli won the match and the title in front of a huge turnout of fans at Ahli's indoor hall. With the victory, Ahli avenged last year's defeat to another Kenyan team, the Pipe Lines. Ahli's Tahani Tosson, the continent's top player for the past several years, was selected best player of the tournament.

Surprise, surprise

LOWLY Aswan pulled off one of the season's biggest upsets, beating football league leaders Ahli 2-0 in Cairo. The loss, coupled with Zamalek's 2-0 victory over Suez, brought Zamalek to within six points of Ahli in the 19th week of the national league event. A thunderous shot from Ayman Abdel-Aleem and a breakaway by Ahmed Raslan sealed Ahli's fate and gave relegation-threatened Aswan some breathing space. Moussa Touri, the newly-acquired Burkina Faso forward, paid quick dividends for Zamalek, scoring in the opening minute. The second goal was scored by Mohamed Kamouna in the 43rd minute of the second half. Other results saw Ittihad beat Minya 2-1, Qena edge Shams 1-0, Mansoura defeat Ismaili 1-0 and Ittihad Othman beat Mehalla 1-0.

Military clout

EGYPT'S military football team lost to Morocco 1-2 in Cairo in African qualifiers for the Military World Cup. Morocco's two goals were scored by Mohamed Fadl in the 14th and 19th minutes, while Egypt's sole goal was scored by Abdel-Hamid Bassiouni in the sixth minute of the second half. The second and deciding game is to be played in Morocco in two weeks.

Battle for No. 1

NOW that outgoing FIFA President Joao Havelange is stepping down, the battle for who will be the next head of world football is about to explode with the announcement that FIFA general-secretary Sepp Blatter will run against UEFA President Lennart Johansson. Blatter will hold a press conference with World Cup co-organiser Michel Platini during which he is expected to announce his candidacy officially for FIFA's presidency.

Jumping ahead

EGYPT'S national football team leapt to 21st place in the world rankings, progressing six places thanks to their victory in the African Nations Cup in Burkina Faso last month. Egypt now ranks second among Arab teams, after Morocco, with Tunisia placing third, Saudi Arabia fourth and the United Arab Emirates fifth. Brazil is ranked top of the list, followed by Germany, the Czech Republic, Mexico, England, Holland and Argentina. Italy is in 13th place, while France retreated to 14th.

World Cup countdown

WITH ONLY three months to go before the biggest event in this year's sporting calendar kicks off in France, the *Weekly* brings you all the thrills and spills of the action-packed run-in: hot news on the hottest teams, wrapped up in our unforgettable trademark prose!

□ England star Paul Gascoigne faces new turmoil over an injury which could rule him out of the World Cup. The 31-year-old mid-fielder reportedly went into hospital with stomach pains and, fearing the problem to be a hernia, knows that surgery would rule him out of a trip to France in the summer. Gascoigne has only played one full game since November for Glasgow Rangers because of a persistent ankle injury. He was just returning to full training when the stomach pains flared up.

□ With just three months to go, South Africa's new coach, Frenchman Phillipe Troussier, took over the running of the team last week. Troussier knows he is in a race against time. "I know we don't have much time to prepare for the World Cup," he said. "I don't have time to teach, that's why I'm looking for operational players who are ready now." Troussier promised "new faces and old faces" would be in the line-up for France. He said he was "very impressed by the potential" of Benny McCarthy of Ajax Amsterdam, whose goals led South Africa into the African Cup finals against Egypt in February, where they lost 2-0. South Africa will face France, Denmark and Saudi Arabia in their first round pool.

□ Robert Prosinecki, former star of Real Madrid and Barcelona, is staying with Croatia Zagreb, the club where he launched his illustrious career. "I have decided to stay," the 29-year-old Prosinecki told the daily *Sportska Novosti*. "I feel great in Zagreb and the club management have convinced me that they want to build a strong club. They've offered me a four-year contract on very good terms, so I'll probably finish my career here." Prosinecki, who was in Yugoslavia's 1990 World Cup team, is expected to be one of Croatia's most influential players in France. Croatia is in Group H along with fellow rookies Japan and Jamaica and two-time champion Argentina.

□ Three months away from kick-off, the two most powerful men in soccer still appear to be feuding. Lennart Johansson, president of UEFA, has renewed his criticisms of FIFA President Joao Havelange, the man he hopes to replace later this year. In an interview published Sunday in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, Johansson accused Havelange of unacceptable behaviour and said he would push for an independent accountant to examine FIFA's business practices under the 81-year-old Brazilian lawyer. The row erupted in mid-march when Johansson's allies at the FIFA executive committee meeting demanded that Secretary-General Sepp Blatter resign his post if he planned to be a candidate for the presidency. Havelange, who plans to retire this summer after 24 years in control, rejected the demand and ended the meeting before a vote could be taken.

Compiled from wires by ***Dalia El-Hennawy***

Chant Avedissian:

Go East, young man

Costume drama, boxes and a penchant for the East. But never, never exotic









"I shall wear a costume from Mongolia... practice calligraphy... from the cultural revolution and then dress in black, and be modern, because everyone dresses in black in Korea, and you will interrogate me"

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Asked to describe what he does, Chant Avedissian becomes coy. Once upon a time he took photographs, "but the minute you say you are a photographer you run the risk of going mad." For a decade he worked with Hassan Fathi, compiling his archives, filing, cataloguing, imposing order on mountains of paper, on drawings, plans and theoretical texts. And this "was possible only because I am not an architect." He travelled the length and breadth of Egypt, photographing Fathi's extant buildings for a book published by the Aga Khan Foundation. In 1990 he showed a collection of clothes at the Institut du Monde Arabe, reworkings of traditional costumes, the patterns meticulously miniaturised and, of course, filed, alongside samples of the cloth used. In 1995 his textile hangings were shown at the Barbican Centre, London; later, stencils were exhibited at Leighton House, London and the British Council, Cairo. Last year he was commissioned by British Airways to produce a design for the fin of an aeroplane. And since 1991 he has been engaged in an on-going series of images, monotypes created from stencils, reworkings of photographic sources, of pictures that first appeared in magazines and newspapers published in Cairo in the late '40s and '50s. (It is these latter that provide the most valid clues to current preoccupations.) He studied painting at the Montreal School of Art and Design and applied arts at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Currently, he works out of one room, divided into two levels, in an apartment shared with his sister.

Chant Avedissian is irreverent, seriously if selectively so. Certain things are simply fair game, the French for instance.

"Countries celebrate what they are not, celebrate the antithesis of what they are. The French go on screaming about liberté, egalité, fraternité, but could any people anywhere contrive a greater xenophobia, be more racist?"

"India is too colourful."

"To sit on a chair is pompous."

The one-liners come thick and fast and it is perfectly reasonable to wonder whether they are intended to be taken seriously. They are, up to a point.

You can just see a little peep of the Passage in the Looking-Glass House, if you leave the door of our drawing room wide open: and it is very like our passage as far as you can see, only you know it may be quite different beyond...

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

"In China it is profoundly unimportant to know about Picasso and Braque painting in L'Estaque in 1907. They simply don't care, about the origins of cubism, about any of these -isms. They are, after all, just rectangular things to hang on the walls and the Chinese don't hang rectangular things on the wall. They roll things up and put them in boxes."

Chant Avedissian has been conducting an affair with the Far East. He has travelled in China and Mongolia. He knows the back streets of Ulanbaatar and the price of Genghis Khan vodka. His exercises in Chinese calligraphy fill several books. In 1995 he was the only Egyptian to take part in the Korean Biennale.

"We must go East," he announces. "Why visit Paris, London, New York when the West is here, in Cairo. Cairo can be more West than the West; it can be a parody of New York, more exaggeratedly French than the French. The Middle East, Europe, they are reflections of one another. But in China they do not care what lies to the West. Mention Egypt and they might have heard about the Pyramids but nothing else. This gives space. In Egypt I am Armenian, in Europe I am Egyptian, but in China these definitions mean nothing."

Yet if the Middle East is merely an extension of Europe, or vice-versa, Egypt retains a firm hold on his affections. It is just that there are difficulties. In one published interview he tells his interviewer, quite baldly, that his work is too Egyptian to be noticed here.

And again, there is a point. He adores Hassan Fathi, has only the fondest of memories.

"Fathi was, in some ways, very like Matisse. As an old man, Matisse would receive visitors who sought him out, and the first question he would ask was what did you think of the flowers. And of course, these people would be so nervous about coming to see the great man, the exemplary modernist, that they failed to notice the flowers in the garden, could not describe them, and then Matisse, a little disingenuously, would dismiss them. While Fathi was always polite, visiting him could become an ordeal. Experts on Islamic architecture would come from Geneva. And then they had to cross Mohamed Ali Street, and find his house, and climb the stairs, and for these Geneva based experts it was often their first real experience of Islamic architecture. Visiting Fathi constituted a little course in Islamic architecture all by itself."

Avedissian's photographic work with Fathi, however, seems to eschew this lived experience. His architectural photographs are essays in reduction. A horizontal band of light picks out the stones in the courtyard of Sultan Hassan, the custodian of Al-Muayad is caught in a perfect triangle of light that pours through the door. These are geometric abstractions, and it is on the non-negotiability of these perfectly balanced equations that he focuses.

In many ways his work has been an extended experiment in paring down, an exercise in reduction.

"There is no room for paintings in an Arab house and so I started to produce textile hangings. There is, really, no room for chairs in an Arab house." Not surprisingly, Avedissian has experimented with making chairs, wooden boxes, the size of a brick, in which tea-making things can be stored, and on which one might squat. They were a product of his first visit to China, after which he determined to work only in carpentry, make only boxes, a short-lived resolution and one perfectly indicative of the way he does things.



His room is full of boxes. Indeed, he inhabits a box, a wooden platform with matting and sliding paper screens. A ladder leads up to a second level where everything is stored, in boxes. It is here that he works.

"It was in China that I discovered you do not need furniture. The necessity of furniture is an illusion. The only necessary things can be rolled away."

And in Mongolia he discovered that architecture too is an illusion. "Yurts. One can live perfectly well in a yurt."

Fortunately, "Egypt is not obsessed with stones. Everything decays."

In 1991, as the Gulf War was raging, Chant Avedissian went to Luxor. He stayed for several months, during which he began to work with stencils. The process is illuminating. He works from photographs — magazine images published three, four decades ago. These images are blown up, partitioned into blocks of plain colour. The stencil is made and then the colour — pigment mixed with gum Arabic — applied onto sheets of wrapping paper, butchers' paper, sometimes corrugated cardboard. "The paper is not acid free. I am not interested in permanence. At some point these images will simply self-destruct."

The works that result are images of images. They often strike a heroic note, these portraits of key-players from the nationalist heyday. There was always, of course, a propagandist element to the photographs, and this is played up, mercilessly, so that many figures are stuck in the mock-heroic poses of socialist realism. The captions, too, are kept, the stylised Arabic script becoming one more decorative element.

The choice is eclectic: a biscuit, Bimbo, or Umm Kulthoum, Dalida, a group of nurses, an hilariously camp photograph that accompanied an article on the tragedy of the mother who has no daughter to help her look after her sons. Nothing is privileged in this most catholic of democracies.

Over the years the stencils have become increasingly flexible, and now can comprise up to 20 separate sheets. These are carefully numbered, and then stored. There are hundreds, and each one is infinitely reproducible. Just take them out, apply the paint.

So has Chant Avedissian consciously developed a method of working that could serve as a neat, perhaps too neat, paradigm of post-modern practice? Signification, appropriation, authorship, deconstruction, discourse, ideology: the buzz words of the last decade are all invoked in his work.

The stencils can be reproduced — "anyone," he says, "can do it." He does not pretend to an authoritative originality. These images of images explore the way symbols shift, the way meanings change when they are put into different contexts. The images are not original — no set of signifiers can be since they are all implicated in the ideologies — patterns of language or representation — of the cultures that produce or interpret them.

The original photographs are historical documents, of a kind. But all this is water off a duck's back. And asked about that other post-modernist determinant — identity — Chant Avedissian becomes coy once more.

"My passport is Egyptian. I am 47. It says I am male. These pictures are my past revisited."

A burst of temper. "My grandmother walked to Syria. My aunt was born during the march. They were fleeing the Turks. Is that what you want?"

And then back to what he does.

"No one can carry on doing the same thing anymore. I cannot paint anymore. There is no point my painting and exhibiting in a gallery in the middle of Paris. I might as well be a panda in the zoo. I would simply be exotic. People should chop and change. Imagine if Youssef Chahine were to be made the director of Cairo Zoo. Cairo Zoo would become a wonderful place to visit. Or the minister of culture was to be put in charge of hospitals. At least they might stop painting operating theatres that dreadful shade of green."

"There will be photographs with this profile?" The man who feels he would be as exotic as a panda in a Parisian gallery becomes animated.

"This is my first public appearance. I am neurotic. I shall wear a costume from Mongolia. There will be a picture of me practising calligraphy. And the cultural revolution. And then I shall dress in black, and be modern, because everyone dresses in black in Korea, and it is very modern. And then" — the images are quickly worked out on paper — "there will be a photograph of you and me. You will be interviewing, a military policeman, and I will be a Ukrainian spy."

And none of this, he insists, is exotic.

"You see, everything will be stylised, will be hieratic, very Pharaonic." Modern Cairo, a reflection of the West, has now moved East. A little journey, perhaps, around the corner of the reflected passage. "There are connections," he says, but refuses to be drawn.

Calligraphy, carpentry, boxes in which to store things made in the past. But what next?

"I think tea ceremonies. Nothing on the wall, just a Japanese tea house and objects in boxes and six people at a time who can take the things out of boxes. But not in a gallery. I don't do galleries anymore."

He does aeroplanes, makes costume dramas, photographs, clothes, stencils, chairs, after a fashion. Some of his most recent work is on scrolls, rolled away, neatly filed. The stencils themselves have become increasingly Far Eastern in feel. They too can be mounted, in series, and folded away. The packaging is immaculate.

Chant Avedissian is very tidy.

Until 3 May Chant Avedissian is exhibiting at the Cultural Centre of Berchem, Antwerp

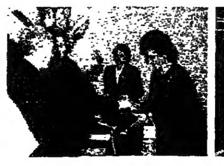
Profile by **Nigel Ryan**

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by Madame Sosostris

♥ Oh dear, I am still trembling from the powerful speech given by **Mona Makram-Ebeid**, the guest of honour at the induction ceremony of the International Hall of Fame. The ceremony, which took place on 26 March at the guest house of Ain Shams University, was organised with the cooperation of the Centre for Developing English Language Teaching. The dynamic **Mona** was prompt, of course, to give credit where it is due, and pay tribute to the achievements of Mrs **Suzanne Mubarak** in the realm of education; then she proceeded to outline a complete programme which, she said, had to be followed if we want to raise generations of responsible citizens. Dear **Mona**! She has so much enthusiasm. But, as I had a chance to observe, she was not the only one: Dr **Maher Mahran**, **Nawal El-Degwi**, **Abdel-Ghaffar Shukr** and **Hisham Sherif** figured as prominently in the award distribution. All I can say is that I feel confident for our children's future with so many luminaries at the education helm.

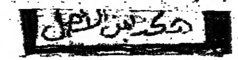
♠ And darlings, since we are on the chapter of education, let me remind you that the New Ramses College Activities Department will be presenting a musical performance by the school's students, enticingly titled *Clowns*, on 3 April at 6.15pm in Dales Hall, Ramses College for Girls. See you there then, and make sure you don that little black number you have been keeping for such a formal occasion. Leave your tots at home too: they are not really welcome, unless they are over five, and exquisitely well-behaved, of course.





(l-r) Makram-Ebeid receiving her award; Omar El-Sherif, Mr and Mrs Hamed El-Chiaty, Nabil Masri with Public Relation Manager Carry Shlieman

♣ I have to share a secret with you, my sweets; for several years I have been embarrassed by people asking what I want for my birthday. It is so crass to just say, "something in gold with lots of diamonds"; on the other hand, one unfortunately cannot trust every good friend to have impeccable taste in everything... It has always been such a dilemma. All this has changed now, however, as you may already know — if, like me, you were invited to float on the Hotel Ship Imperial for an unforgettable evening in celebration of the opening of Fifth Avenue boutique and its new partnership with Tiffany & Co. My good friend **Dora El-Chiati** of Fifth Avenue and **Nabil Masri**, Tiffany & Co. vice-president for the Middle East division, said that they were thrilled to be able to bring to Egypt items worthy of **Holly Golightly**.



Another killing

INSIDE



